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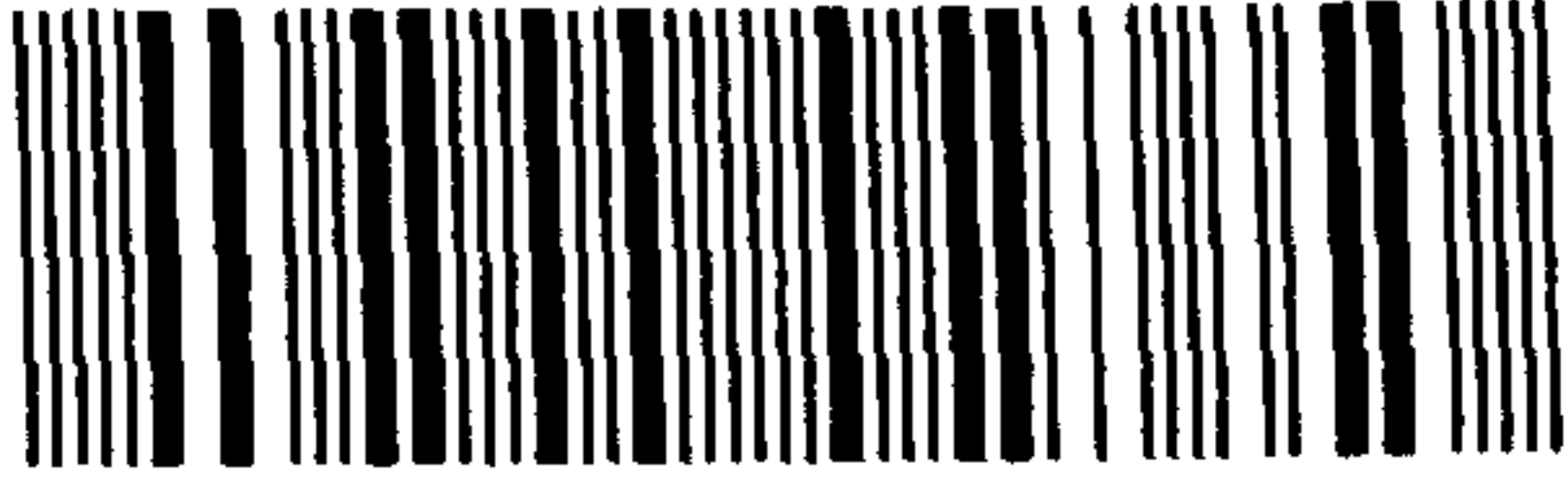
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**Children's voices: the contribution of informal language  
practices to the negotiation of knowledge and identity  
amongst 10-12 year old school pupils.**

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**BA Hons (Durham), Dip Ed (Queens, Belfast), MA (Sussex)**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**The School of Education, Open University**

**November, 1996**

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## Abstract

This research addresses the ways in which children's informal language practices contribute to their negotiations of knowledge and identity. An ethnographic study of 10-12 year olds' talk in and around school was carried out, which included the collection of continuous tape-recordings of talk across the school day, observation and recording of literacy activities, and interviews with thirty four children. Using an ethnography of communication framework together with ideas from the Russian socio-historical writers, this data is analysed and features of children's talk examined in relation to their negotiations of knowledge and identity. In particular, analysis focusses on children's collaborative linguistic strategies, their uses of narrative and literacy, and their taking on of other people's voices. Attention is also paid to the ways in which different aspects of context are involved in the constitution of meaning within dialogue. It is argued that a more dialogic model of communication needs to be developed in order to understand the function and meaning of children's talk and literacy activities. In relation to this, it is suggested that Bakhtin and Volosinov's ideas about dialogic, heteroglossic and intertextual aspects of language use provide an important way of extending current thinking about the role of language in children's construction of knowledge and identity, in relation to more constructivist conceptions of culture, social activity and the self.

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## Transcription conventions

/ indicates where another speaker interrupts or cuts in,

[ indicates simultaneous talk

a word in upper case indicates speaker emphasis

(5 secs) indicates a discernable pause, with approximate timing

(...) indicates words on the tape which are indistinct

Comments in italics and parentheses clarify unclear references, or paralinguistic features eg he (*ie her Dad*), (*laughter*)

(yes) or (em) in children's stories indicate minimal responses from myself, or from another child, as shown by their intital eg (K: yea)

In representing children's voices in the transcripts, I have recorded their non-standard grammatical expressions as accurately as possible, but not the effects of their accents on the pronunciation of particular words. In order to make the transcripts more readable, I have added some written punctuation. Issues of transcription and representation are discussed in Chapter Three.

Names of people and places have been changed, to protect anonymity.



## Chapter One: Introduction

The research reported in this thesis grew out of the coming together of two separate intellectual and disciplinary strands within my professional experience. Having trained initially as an anthropologist, I subsequently worked for many years within the field of language and education, first teaching and developing a curriculum project in schools in N. Ireland, then planning and writing courses for teachers and other students at the Open University. My approach to studying children's language is shaped both by an educationalist's interest in how children use talk and literacy to further their learning, and by an anthropologist's concern to set aside educational preconceptions in order to document and understand children's language use from the point of view of their own perspectives and priorities.

The question of how children use informal talk among themselves to explore and construct meaning was first clearly raised for me in the early 1980s, when I became involved in a classroom research project investigating how teachers use dialogue with their pupils to establish shared understanding about classroom procedures and knowledge (reported in Edwards and Mercer 1987). The strong Vygotskian orientation of this project provided an important building block for the theoretical foundation of my own research. The project involved video-recording teachers working with 8-11 year old pupils over a series of linked lessons in four primary schools, and audio-recording interviews with the teachers and pupils. Analysis of the transcribed tapes showed that knowledge was interactionally constructed through talk, rather than being simply 'transmitted', but that teachers exerted a strong control over the construction and therefore the nature of the

knowledge. Analysis also revealed that the institutional and physical context, and the relationships between the speakers and their shared histories, were implicitly invoked as an integral part of knowledge construction.

My experience working on this project convinced me of the importance of dialogue as a site of learning, and of context and history in the constitution of meaning. I was however keenly aware, as we recorded the teacher/pupil dialogues, that these constituted only a very small proportion of the children's total language experience in school. In my own research, I calculated that most children spent no longer than a total of ten minutes in direct one-to-one dialogue with the teacher, during the school day. Pupils were also addressed by the teacher as part of the whole class, and they listened to her dialogues with other pupils, but the vast amount of their oral language experience in school was with each other. I began to wonder about the structure and content of this informal talk, which was carried on between children as they sat together over their work, moved along the school corridors, or hung around the playground at dinnertime. Were these conversations also an important site for knowledge construction, and, if so, what kind of knowledge was being constructed, and how? If pupils were treated as relatively knowledgeless and constrained by specific groundrules in their dialogues with teachers (Edwards and Mercer op cit), how were they being positioned, and constructing positions and identities for themselves, in their more informal talk with peers?

In 1986-7, I returned to my original discipline, and studied for a master's degree in social anthropology. For my dissertation, I chose to focus on how children construct knowledge through informal talk, drawing on my knowledge of the language in education field,

particularly Vygotskian theory, and also on my reading of the ethnography of communication literature, and my growing interest in the Bakhtin/Volosinov writings. My dissertation was based on empirical data from continuous radio microphone recordings of a ten year old girl talking with her friends over three days at school, supplemented by observation notes and informal interviews with the children. My discussion in the dissertation focused on children's collaborative linguistic strategies, their use of reported speech, and the close integration of talk with literacy activities.

My doctoral research has built on and extended this MA project (which thus acted as a pilot), using a larger collection of data, a more comprehensive exploration of theoretical ideas, and a considerable development of analytic concepts and insights. I have also reviewed the data from the original pilot (MA) work, and have drawn on both the pilot and main periods of fieldwork in writing this thesis.

There is very little detailed research available on the structure and meaning of children's informal talk among themselves, or on their informal literacy practices, during the stages of middle childhood and early adolescence. Research on the language experience of this age group tends to fall into two rather different traditions: on the one hand, there are studies framed by educational criteria, often focusing on the classroom; and, on the other, studies focusing on sociological issues, which tend to draw on children's and adolescents' talk in noncurricular activities outside the classroom, and in the street and at youth clubs. Much of the research on talk in school over the last twenty years has focused on teacher-pupil dialogue (for example Edwards and Furlong, 1978, Edwards and Mercer 1987, Edwards and Westgate 1994), with a relatively small number of researchers looking at pupil-pupil talk in small groups set up by the teacher or



researchers with particular learning tasks (for example Barnes and Todd 1977, Phillips 1987, Bennett and Cass 1989). Even fewer researchers have looked at the role of 'off-task' classroom talk, in relation to children's educational learning (an exception is Dyson 1987). Most of this research in classrooms is framed by pedagogical criteria and educationally institutionalised notions of competence, and this kind of framework also underpins research by a number of anthropologists in the United States, who have documented the differences some children experience between language practices at home and at school (Phillips 1973, Michaels 1981, Heath 1983). For instance, although Heath includes an extensive analysis of language and literacy practices within the community, she concentrates on preschool children, and on how compatible their language experience is with the requirements they will later encounter in the classroom. She relies largely on participant observation, and tape-records talk 'only in accordance with community practices' (Heath op cit p9). While these anthropological researchers employ a much richer notion of social context and of its implication in the meaning of language events than the educational researchers I mentioned earlier, and I have built on this in my own work, they do not provide comprehensive accounts of children's language experience across continuous periods of time in relation to the children's own purposes. Rather, they focus on specific events which are often analysed in terms of the contrast between home and school practices. Thus, while there has been considerable interest within education and related research in what kinds of talk might be the most effective for helping pupils gain curriculum knowledge and understanding, and a recognition that there may be significant differences in some children's language use in and out of school, very little is known about the structure and meaning of

undirected talk among children themselves, or about how this might be contributing to their construction of knowledge and identity.

In the more sociologically orientated literature, a number of conversation analysis and ethnographic studies drawing on anthropology and linguistics have focused more directly on children and adolescents' talk outside the classroom, in relation to its role in negotiating relationships and social organisation. Goodwin (1990) shows how the talk of African American children playing in the street constructs and reconstructs their social organisation on an ongoing basis, and Shuman (1986) analyses junior high school students' use of vernacular oral and written texts to negotiate rights within relationships with each other, and with institutional authorities. Hewitt (1986) describes the use of Caribbean Creole by white London adolescents with white and black peers, and its role in renegotiating the symbolic significance of broader patterns of racial stratification. And Rampton (1995), in a similar study to Hewitt's, documents 'language crossing' in informal talk among adolescents of Panjabi, Anglo and Afro-Caribbean descent in the English South Midlands, in relation to their negotiation of social relationships. These more sociological studies involved recording talk almost exclusively from contexts outside the classroom. Hewitt and Rampton used radio microphones to collect adolescents' talk during school lunch periods, and at youth clubs. Although most of Shuman's discussion is based on participant observation with the urban teenagers, she also used a small cassette recorder, slung over her shoulder, to 'record conversations in the hallways and lunchrooms and occasionally in the classrooms' (Shuman 1986 p8). Goodwin, who focused more directly on conversation analysis, used a small portable recorder which she

carried with her, to record children of various ages playing together in the street.

Like the linguists and anthropologists quoted above, I am interested in how children use language in the negotiation of social relationships and values, and, like the educational researchers mentioned earlier, I am interested in how dialogues contribute to the construction of knowledge. However, my study is distinctive, both in terms of the nature of my data, and in the focus of my analysis. First, in relation to the sociological studies, I am looking at slightly younger children (apart from Goodwin who studied a mixed group of children and teenagers). The 10-12 year olds in my research were at a significant point of transition, as they moved from childhood into adolescence. I was particularly interested to find out how their language use might reveal the cultural knowledge and understandings they had already acquired, and how they might be trying out and negotiating new practices and perspectives. Second, my use of a radio microphone enabled me, like Hewitt and Rampton, to collect recordings of natural talk among children without the researcher or other adults present. It also, however, enabled me to collect continuous recordings across a substantial period of the children's day: that is, their time in school, which includes a range of formal and informal contexts both inside and outside the classroom. Using data from a three day and then a three week period, I was able to look at similarities and contrasts in children's language use across a range of different contexts (for example the classroom, the playground, the informal interview with myself), and I could also begin to recognise patterns of intertextual referencing, as children returned to the same topics in different conversations, and in different contexts. Thus, my data is unusual in treating children's language practices inside and outside the classroom



in terms of their own continuous experience, and in providing the opportunity to track topics and language strategies across different conversations over a sustained period of time. In fact, I found that 'classroom talk' is much more generically varied and diverse than the educational research would suggest, and that there are many important sites for various kinds of informal talk, interwoven with curriculum activities. While children's talk with teachers about these activities was an important part of their school language experience, there was a range of other kinds of language events occurring in the classroom, many of which blurred the educational distinction between 'off-task' and 'on-task' talk. From the perspective of children themselves, the processes of knowledge and identity construction continue at various levels across different contexts, and social and intellectual purposes are closely integrated.

There are both practical and theoretical reasons for the absence of any previous substantial research on children's informal talk across lengthy periods of the day. Before radio microphones became more widely available, it was very difficult to make continuous recordings of the natural speech of people moving around in the course of their everyday activities. In addition to the technical problems, I would also suggest that the dominant traditional paradigms within linguistics and psychology, with their focus on universals on the one hand, and individual skills on the other, have not provided an appropriate framework for research on informal language use. In this thesis I shall argue that, in order to understand the function and meaning of children's informal talk, we need to move away from the traditional transmission model of communication which characterizes talk essentially as a medium for the conveying of information from a speaker to a listener, more or less accurately, and that we should

instead adopt a more dialogic model of communication, which acknowledges the contextual and cultural constitution of language function and meaning.

There has been a steady development over the past twenty years of more socially orientated approaches to language, in a number of related disciplines across the social sciences. At the same time, constructivist and poststructuralist ideas have shifted the focus of interest from constructs like individuals and texts to the dynamic relations between them, and have reconceptualised such constructs as process rather than product. As a result of this change in orientation, new questions are emerging about the relationship between language use and identity, and about how relationships between text (oral or written) and context can be conceptualised. In addition, researchers are seeking to address and describe the intertextual and historical dimensions of language use, and the links between local language interactions and broader patterns of social structure and cultural values. Within the field of ethnography of communication, conceptions of the relationship between text and context have moved on from Malinowski's structural functionalist idea of 'context of situation', through conceptions of 'ways with words' and 'literacy practices', to a socially and culturally constituted conception of discourse (borrowing from Foucault) which acknowledges the dynamic nature of social processes, and the wider structure of power relations. While ethnographic studies of language and literacy are now drawing on more complex notions of cultural and historical context, conversational analysts have reconceptualised context at the micro-level as dynamic, emergent, and interactionally constituted.

Similarly, recent anthropological and psychological studies have suggested a more dynamic, socially constituted notion of identity.



People's sense of self is seen as emerging through socially and culturally organised meanings and practices. For instance, some anthropologists have begun to explore how people express and construct aspects of identity through different literacy practices (Besnier 1989, Street 1993a). Within the emerging area of discursive psychology, researchers see the self as defined and redefined through dialogues across different contexts and relationships (Henriques et al 1984, Potter and Wetherell 1987). If aspects of identity are seen as being negotiated and renegotiated within different contexts, so too is the knowledge which children are acquiring about social institutions and practices and cultural values. This more dynamic view of children's construction of knowledge is strengthened by Vygotskian theory, which suggests that children learn new concepts through social dialogue, before internalizing them to feed into individual cognitive development. Furthermore, in Vygotsky's process-focused conception of the relationship between words and thoughts, there is a constant back and forth checking and changing, both through inner speech or thought, and through new dialogues where additional possible meanings and interpretations are introduced. Thus the nature of knowledge shifts and changes, as it is modified and remodified in the dialectical relationships between thought, dialogue and experience. From this kind of perspective, notions of identity and knowledge are closely interrelated; within Foucault's concept of 'the order of discourse', both are organised within particular discursive complexes of conceptions, classification and language use (Foucault 1981).

I shall suggest in this thesis that the questions emerging from current language studies in the Western social sciences about language, identity and knowledge, text and context, and the micro and macro-context, can be further pursued through drawing on theories from the

Russian sociohistorical writers. Theoretical ideas about dialogicality, heteroglossia and reported speech from the work of Volosinov and Bakhtin<sup>1</sup> may be combined with Vygotsky's conception of language as mediating between sociocultural experience and individual cognitive development, to offer a distinctly social, dialogic model of interaction within a socially and culturally constituted theory of language and thought. This model is particularly useful in relation to the analysis of dynamic and ideological features of language use.

While my research is rooted in the ethnography of communication tradition, with its strong emphasis on documenting social practices, I draw on ideas from the Russian sociohistorical writers in the analysis of my data to focus on children's collaborative linguistic strategies, their uses of narrative and literacy, and their taking on of other people's voices. I argue that a more dialogic model needs to be developed in order to understand the function and meaning of children's talk and literacy activities, and that the Russian writers' theories can provide an important way of extending current thinking about the role of language in children's construction of knowledge and identity, in relation to more constructivist conceptions of culture, social activity and the self.

To summarise the position of my own research within the field, in theoretical terms, I develop the notion of a dialogical model, in relation to key questions raised within current language studies

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<sup>1</sup> There is some controversy over the authorship of publications from the Bakhtin circle; for example, although the English translators of *Marxism and the philosophy of language* claim that the weight of evidence supports Volosinov's authorship, Clark and Holquist (1984) argue that it was in fact written by Bakhtin. Since a detailed review of arguments about Bakhtin/Volosinov authorship is not appropriate within this thesis, I shall be referring to their work according to the authorship assigned in the English translations I am using.

within the social sciences. In particular, I suggest ways of extending current ideas about the relationship between text and context, collaborative aspects of talk, and the significance of children's use of reported speech. In methodological terms, my research supplements the ethnography of communication approach with ideas from the Russian sociohistorical writers, to generate a dense description and analysis of continuous recordings of 10-12 year olds' talk, across a range of contexts. Lastly, at the empirical level, I provide detailed data of children's naturally occurring talk and engagement with written texts, which illustrates, from an emic perspective, their own preoccupations and priorities as they move from childhood into adolescence. Although I have distanced myself to some extent from the criteria and frameworks of mainstream educational research, my findings nevertheless have relevance for teachers and educationalists, as well as for other social scientists.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the shift from traditional structuralist theories of linguistics to more socially orientated approaches. I look in particular at theoretical developments within the ethnography of communication tradition, concerning the relationship of the function and meaning of language use to its cultural and social context. I examine how Malinowski's notion of 'context of situation' has been extended in Hymes' ideas about the various ways in which utterances are embedded in social practice, and in different layers of sociocultural context, and I look at the complementary notions of frame, key and audience (Goffman) and contextualisation cues (Gumperz). Parallel developments from Malinowski's work within British linguistics have been incorporated in Halliday's ideas about the ideational and interpersonal functions of language, and in his description of its social contextualisation in terms of field, tenor and



mode. I discuss US research studies of children's language use which have employed the ethnography of communication concepts and developed them further, for example in Heath's notion of the literacy event. I also look at research on conversational narrative, and at recent ethnographic work which puts more emphasis on ideological aspects of language, for example in Street's notion of literacy practices, and in the increasing orientation among researchers towards a more Foucauldian concept of discourse. This recent work also employs a more complex concept of context, and a more constructivist notion of identity, which are similar to those emerging from current discourse studies within social psychology.

To develop a more dialogic model of communication, and to extend theory in relation to issues highlighted in the literature referred to above, I review a number of ideas in the Bakhtin/Volosinov writings, and in Vygotsky's work. In particular I discuss Bakhtin and Volosinov's conceptions of the ideological nature of language, the embeddedness of the utterance in social material conditions, their theory of dialogism, and Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia and the constant struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces within language. Bakhtin and Volosinov's application of these ideas to the study of reported speech is especially relevant to my own research. In addition, I show how Vygotsky shares these writers' beliefs about the social origins of language and thought, and explores the psychological implications of this perspective in his sociocognitive theory of children's language and conceptual development. I suggest that his theory can be applied to talk between peers as well as to more asymmetrical interactions, and that putting Vygotsky's ideas together with those of Bakhtin and Volosinov provides a powerful framework for developing my own research.

In Chapter Three, I explain my choice of ethnographic research methods in relation to my theoretical orientation, and my assumption of a dialectical relationship between studying text, and studying context. I highlight a number of issues within ethnography which are relevant to my aim of understanding children's language practices from the perspective of their own beliefs, values and priorities, rather than from the point of view of educational or pedagogic criteria. I discuss the implications of doing ethnographic research 'at home', and consider the issues raised in ethnographic work with children, particularly in connection with my personal relationship to them, and the ethical aspects of recording private conversations. This chapter also describes the research setting and documents my pilot and main fieldwork, explaining my approach to observing, recording, and interviewing the children. Finally, I explain how I processed and analysed the data, in relation to my focus on events and practices, and my aim of discovering recurring patterns in terms of uses of language, interactional relationships, and ways of orientating to texts, knowledge and identity.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six, I use findings from my research to extend discussion of the three issues which emerged from the review of theory in Chapter Two as central to understanding how children's language practices contribute to their construction of knowledge and identity: the relationship between talk and context, the heteroglossic nature of speech, and the argument that meanings are dialogically and collaboratively negotiated. In Chapter Four, I discuss the various ways in which talk acknowledges, invokes and creates context, the relationships between text, genre and context, and children's manipulation of interpretative frames. I argue that this manipulation, together with intertextual referencing, makes the relationship

between text and context complex and intricate. Chapter Five documents children's use of reported voices to evoke people, relationships, scenarios and evaluative viewpoints. I look at how reported speech is framed and appropriated in relation to speaker purposes, and to varying degrees of mitigation and commitment, and I discuss how the dialogic relationship between the speaker's and the reported voice contributes to the ongoing construction of meaning. In Vygotskian terms, I suggest that the appropriation of voices may be an important aspect of educational and moral development. In Chapter Six, I demonstrate how children's talk involves collaboration at the level of turntaking, grammatical structure, conceptual units, and in the expression and pursuing of social goals. I look at patterns of collaboration between members of friendship pairs in the interviews, the practice of 'duetting', and collaborative features of talk in girls', boys' and mixed gender groups. I suggest that while there is some evidence to support the notion of different interactional styles associated with gender, most children exhibit a range of styles across different contexts, and relations between gender and language use are mediated by social processes and contextual features.

The relationship between text and context, children's taking on and reproduction of other people's voices, and the collaborative construction of meaning provide the focal points for my discussion of children's uses of conversational narrative in Chapter Seven. I show how the links narratives make with their conversational and broader contexts, the children's use of dialogue within the stories, and the various levels of collaboration between story tellers and listeners, are all centrally implicated in the structure, function and meaning of children's stories and anecdotes. I focus on what Labov calls the evaluative function of narrative, but employ a more developed notion



of context and place a greater emphasis on the use of reported speech, which I argue plays a crucial role in enabling children to explore and negotiate a number of evaluative perspectives in their ongoing construction of knowledge and identity. The children's stories show them grappling with accounts of human relationships, moral issues about care and cruelty, and changing aspects of their own gendered identity. These stories have resonances with concerns and issues cropping up elsewhere in the children's conversations, and I suggest that they function at a meta-level as turns in what might be called a 'long conversation', which is carried on between children in different places and at different times, concerning various aspects of moving from childhood into adolescence in a particular cultural setting.

In Chapter Eight, I document the range of literacy activities I recorded among the 10-12 year olds, and analyse a number of literacy events in more detail, to show how these are serving to construct forms of knowledge and to constitute identities. I describe how the institutional power of the school, which allocates importance to particular knowledges, texts and discourses rather than others, is diffused throughout the management of time, space and activity in the classroom, particularly through the literacy activities organised around worksheets. However, within this system, children find opportunities to pursue personal goals, transform activities, and appropriate classroom strategies and genres for literacy activities outside the school curriculum. I argue that this undercuts the apparent contrast between authoritative and informal literacy practices, and that there is a dynamic relationship between the centripetal force represented by the pedagogisation of literacy, and centrifugal forces in the children's own vernacularisation of school tasks and strategies.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, I review the aims of my research, and summarise my findings. I discuss how my study contributes to the field at both the theoretical and the empirical level, and I also consider how my research relates to more general questions which are currently relevant to language study in different areas across the social sciences.



## Chapter Two: Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Introduction: from language system to language use

My focus on children's social language behaviour in specific settings requires a rather different kind of theoretical framework from that provided by the major conceptual orientations which have dominated linguistics and psychology during a large part of the twentieth century: the abstract system of structural linguistics which treats language as independent of social context, and the conceptions of individually located skills, and universal stages of development within Chomskian linguistics and Piagetian psychology. These theoretical frameworks marginalise or render irrelevant the very aspects of language use which are crucial to my research; that is, the particular combinations of social, cultural and historical forces which shape and influence naturally occurring language interactions and which, as I shall demonstrate in this thesis, are centrally implicated in children's negotiation of knowledge and identity through talk.

The conception of language as an abstract system has been particularly associated with the work of Saussure in the early part of the twentieth century (Saussure 1974). His ideas have had a powerful influence on literary theory and cultural studies from the late 1960s as well as on linguistics itself. This dominant model focuses on the substance of language, conceived of as a kind of autonomous mechanism containing phonemes, morphemes, clauses, sentences and so on. For Saussure, language works through the abstract systematic relationships between these elements, which convey meaning first

through the arbitrary relationships assigned between signs, for example words, and that which they signify within particular speech communities, and secondly through the modification of elements' meaning by their opposition to other elements in the system. These conventions or rules of language which he refers to as 'langue' form a 'social contract' between speakers. Their actual speech which forms part of social transactions on specific occasions he terms 'parole', thus setting up an important theoretical distinction between language system and text. Saussure relegated 'parole' to the periphery of what counted for him as the main business of linguistic science, which was the study of the system itself.

This distinction between langue and parole is reflected in the distinction put forward by Chomsky in the 1950s between language 'competence' (the underlying knowledge about grammar which every speaker possesses) and 'performance' (what they say on a particular occasion). Although Chomsky did not see himself as a structuralist, his theory of transformational generative grammar also treats language as an autonomous mechanism whose structure can be described and analysed independently of the social contexts of its use. Both Chomsky and Saussure treat actual spoken and written language texts as essentially being produced by individual speakers, and neither of them give attention to contextual factors; in fact these are often seen as contaminating the linguistic evidence. Chomsky sets this out particularly explicitly: 'Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogenous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distraction, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or

characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance.' (1965 p3).

Chomsky's focus on individual competence and universal laws is echoed in the work of Jean Piaget (also reacting against stimulus-response explanations of behaviour), whose theories have exerted a major influence on the field of child development throughout the twentieth century. Piaget offers a detailed account of universal stages in human development to explain when and how children are ready to learn or develop particular kinds of knowledge. Although he sees social interaction, including talk, as playing an important role in cognitive development, in Piaget's view the child's own internal developmental trajectory has priority: 'in order to understand the adult and his language, the child needs means of assimilation which are formed through structures preliminary to the social transmission itself' (Piaget 1969 quoted in Edwards and Mercer 1987). For Piaget, the direction of development is always from the individual to the social; children learn through individual actions on the world around, and only then are able to talk to others about what they understand.

Saussure, Chomsky and Piaget all employ a rationalist, individualistic model of the self which is clearly separate from its surrounding social context. For instance when Piaget discusses how a disagreement between individuals may generate reflective activity which contributes to cognitive development, the image is of two separate minds colliding, then separating to reflect independently and each regain their individual mental equilibrium. Similarly, although Saussure is interested in how meanings can be exchanged between people and produced a highly influential model of the communication process, this is essentially individualistic and decontextualised. Thus

he shows ideas originating in one person's mind and being transferred via language to the mind of another:

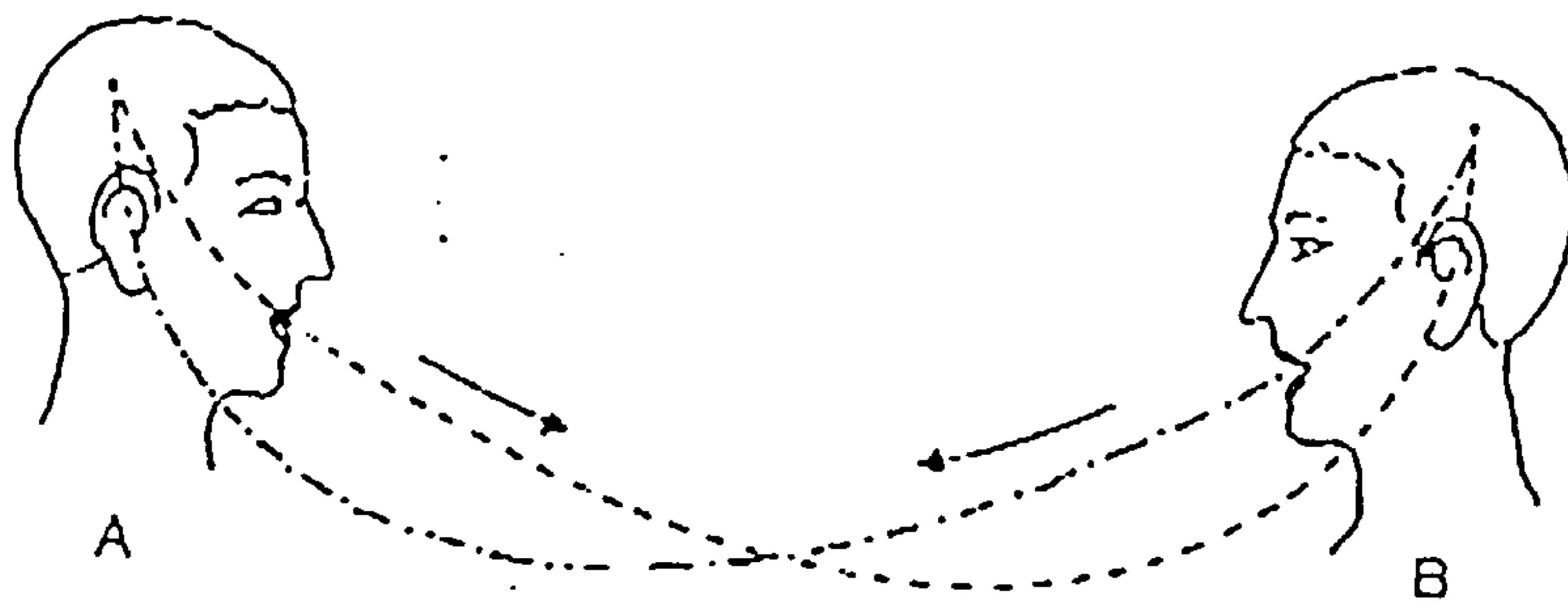


Figure 2.1 A model of the communication process (based on Saussure 1974 p11)

This 'transmission' or 'conduit' model assumes that definite meanings are encoded in texts, whether oral or written language, or visual images, which are recoverable by a listener, reader or viewer who possesses the necessary decoding skills.

These major conceptual frameworks do not address the ways in which context in social, cultural and historical terms influences the structure, function and meaning of children's specific language interactions, or the collaborative nature of these, or the implications of contextual and collaborative factors for the contribution of children's informal uses of language to their construction of knowledge and identity.

The theoretical traditions which I have used to develop my own framework have emerged in some ways in opposition to the major paradigms described above, and attempt to shift the focus of language studies away from abstract systems and universals to situated, real life speech. Hymes, a key figure in the ethnography of communication tradition which provided the initial motivation for my own work, argued in the 1970s that in addition to structuralist linguistic studies,



research was needed on language use in everyday communicative events, and that children's developing social communicative competence was just as important as Chomsky's 'grammatical competence'. Volosinov, who together with the other Russian sociohistorical writers Bakhtin and Vygotsky has provided my second major theoretical resource, also explicitly rejected what he called Saussure's 'abstract objectivism' (Volosinov 1986). Volosinov argues that traditional structuralist linguistics is orientated towards the 'isolated monologic utterance', typically exemplified in the nineteenth century philologists' focus on texts from dead languages. Also rejecting 'individualistic subjectivism', which explains language creativity in terms of individual psychology, Volosinov argues that the basic reality of language is 'not the abstract system of linguistic forms, not the isolated monologic utterance, and not the psychophysiological act of its implementation, but the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance or utterances' (op cit p94). Again, in Vygotsky's argument for a social theory of linguistic and cognitive development, he contrasts his position with Piaget's, arguing that the direction of development in language and thought is not from the individual to the social, but the other way round: children experience language in situated social dialogue, and these dialogues are then internalised to feed into individual cognitive development.

As I shall show in my literature review below, there has been a steady development over the last twenty years of more socially orientated approaches to language, in a number of related disciplines across the social sciences. But it has been difficult in Western academic research to move away from the structuralist distinction between system and text, and the traditional individualistic focus. Halliday's theory of language as social semiotic (1986), for instance, is

still grounded in relationships between clauses, and six out of seven of the initial language functions which he claims young children develop are phrased in terms of individual 'needs'. However the increasing influence of poststructuralist ideas in the West is beginning to shift the focus of interest from constructs like individuals and texts to the dynamic relationships between them and to reconceptualise such constructs as process rather than product. Thus the meaning of texts is no longer lodged in the words, but in different readings (Barthes 1970, Iser 1971). Texts themselves are seen as embedded in the processes of production, circulation and consumption (Fairclough 1996a), context is treated as dynamic and emergent (Duranti and Goodwin 1992), and culture itself is defined as a verb rather than a noun (Street 1993b). In this more processual view of language and social action, the 'self' becomes more distributed, being defined and redefined across different contexts and relationships (Henriques et al 1984, Potter and Wetherell 1987, Street 1993a, Fairclough 1996b).

The growth of European poststructuralism (which reacts against, but at the same time draws on, Marxist theory) has helped to create a receptive intellectual climate for the ideas of the Russian sociohistorical theorists, whose work was mainly done in the 1930s, but has only been available in the West since the 1960s. I shall argue in this thesis that Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and Volosinov offer a perspective on language which can advance theory in those very areas which have emerged as of particular interest within current Western language studies (for example Gee 1996, New London Group 1996). Such areas are: how the different kinds of relationship between language and context can be conceptualised, the analysis of

intertextuality and intercontextuality<sup>2</sup>, how to address and describe the social and historical dimensions of language interactions, and the relationship between the micro-level of individual language acts and broader patterns of social structure and cultural values. These questions all influence my own research, where I am looking at naturally occurring language interactions between a variety of children, sometimes with adults, across a range of contexts, over a specific period of time. An analysis of the contribution of these interactions to children's ongoing negotiation of knowledge and identity must inevitably invoke particular conceptualisations of context (including history), communication, individual identity, and the relations between them.

I shall review the development of ideas in the literature relating to these issues under two broad headings:

- a. The relationship of cultural and social context to the function and meaning of language. I shall discuss work developing out of the ethnography of communication tradition and related areas, and the recent trend towards more poststructuralist notions of context and identity.
- b. The contribution of Russian sociohistorical writers Bakhtin, Volosinov and Vygotsky to a more thoroughly dialogic model of communication and the implications of this for conceptions of text, context, intertextuality, and identity.

I shall draw together the implications of these research and theoretical traditions in relation to how children negotiate knowledge

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2 While the term 'intertextuality' is generally used for the way a text refers, explicitly or implicitly, to another text, Bakhtinian theory would suggest that such references actually invoke other contexts, therefore a more accurate term would be 'intercontextuality'.



about cultural institutions, social relations, and their own personal agency. Combining these different intellectual traditions, I shall argue, provides a powerful theoretical framework within which I can develop the description, analysis and interpretation of my own research and findings.

## **2.2 The relationship of cultural and social context to the functions and meaning of language**

### **The 'context of situation': a functional view of language**

Ideas about the social functions of language and the importance of context which were later developed in the work of sociolinguists in Britain and ethnographers of communication in America can be traced back to the writings of the anthropologist Malinowski, and his research into the role of language in the daily life of the Pacific Trobriand Islanders. Rejecting the philologists' focus on dead, inscribed languages, and the Saussurean model of communication (see above p. 20), he argues that language is a part of social activity, thus laying the groundwork for the ethnography of communication. In order to understand any piece of language in use, Malinowski argued, we need to understand its 'context of situation', a concept later elaborated in different ways by Hymes in anthropology and Halliday in sociolinguistics. Thus, for Malinowski: 'The false conception of language as a means of transfusing ideas from the head of the speaker to that of the listener has, in my opinion, largely vitiated the philological approach to language. The view set forth here (in *The language of magic and gardening*) is not merely academic: it compels us, as we shall see, to correlate the study of language with that of other activities, to interpret the meaning of each utterance within its



actual context'. (1935:9). In his essay 'The problem of meaning in primitive languages' Malinowski (1923) argues that the context of situation is centrally important to language meaning, demonstrating how the 'decontextualised' translation of a native utterance into English is meaningless without an understanding of social, technological and cultural aspects of the situation in which it is used: 'utterance and context are bound up inextricably with each other and the context of situation is indispensable for the understanding of the words.' (p 467). In Malinowski's view, the Trobrianders' use of language was not primarily about conveying thoughts but about fulfilling social (and ultimately individual biological) functions. Language facilitates the accomplishment of social tasks, for example the collaborative activity required on a fishing expedition, and even seemingly meaningless small talk functions through 'phatic communion' to create a pleasurable social state of 'convivial gregariousness' (Malinowski 1923 p479). His insistence that 'words are parts of actions and they are equivalents to action' (1935 p9) and of their illocutionary force 'You utter a vow, or you forge a signature, and you may find yourself bound for life to a monastery, a woman or a prison' (op cit p53), anticipates the later work of speech act theorists such as Grice and Searle, while avoiding their rather ethnocentric approach through a greater sensitivity to the cultural relativity of meaning (Hasan 1985).

Interestingly, Malinowski suggests that in phatic communion language creates its own 'context of situation'. The constitution of context through talk has been explored in more recent conversation analysis studies (discussed later below), and is also an important strand within the development of my own thesis. In addition, Malinowski indicates more specifically how 'words take their meaning through the context

of other words, sentences from other sentences, and so each word ultimately has meaning only as a larger significant whole' (Malinowski 1935 quoted in Hasan 1985). He thus points towards possibilities for patterns of collocation and coherence. While I shall not be considering Halliday and Hasan's further explorations of these patterns in their analyses of linguistic text, in my own research the ways in which the children's words, utterances, stories and so on take their meaning from different layers of the conversational context, and from intertextual references, is a central theme. Intertextual issues of collocation and coherence in the constitution of meaning are addressed from a dialogical perspective in Bakhtin and Volosinov's work, which I shall discuss below.

Malinowski has been accused of reductionism in overemphasising the social functions of language to satisfy basic human needs (Bailey 1985). His assumed contrast between primitive and civilised culture and thought, which is no longer tenable today, may have led him to neglect some intellectual and creative aspects of language use. But his detailed demonstration of the contextual constitution of the function and meaning of language in particular cultural contexts has been a seminal resource for sociolinguists and ethnographers of communication, and has strongly influenced my own research.

In Britain, Malinowski's ideas were taken up and developed by the influential linguist, Firth, and by Firth's student Halliday who is one of the two major contemporary British theorists to have seriously tackled the question of how language, social context and the social order are interlinked in the production of meaning- the other is the sociologist and educationalist Bernstein. Both Halliday and Bernstein place a strong emphasis on the functions of language use. Because they are concerned with theory building at the level of system, the

framing of their work and their significant generative units are rather different from my own. Halliday, as I mentioned earlier in the introduction to this chapter, retains an individualistic view of child development and a Saussurean view of system and text; Bernstein foregrounds the relationships between different categories of the social division of labour, played out and transmitted in key institutional contexts through particular linguistic and communicative practices. In contrast, rather than starting from the perspective of language as part of a social system, I am focusing on specific utterances, and generating ideas about how these relate to context and the social order through the evidence they provide about children's own orientation and concerns. Thus my own generative units are drawn mainly from ethnography (practices, events) and Russian sociohistorical literature (utterance, voice, dialogical relations), as I shall discuss below. I shall therefore not be using Bernstein's more sociologically orientated ideas, interesting though these are in addressing the social meaning of language practices from some points of view. However, two central aspects of Halliday's systemic-functional theory of grammar have had a strong influence on my own approach: his view of language as simultaneously expressing both ideas and social relationships, and his theory that these and the social context of a language interaction are linguistically encoded within the text.

Building on Malinowski's idea of the 'context of situation', Halliday divides the situational features of language use into three components: the field (ongoing activity and subject matter), tenor (relationships between people involved) and mode (kind of text associated with particular channels and cultural conventions). Each of these three situational variables generates networks of options from three



corresponding functional components of the semantic system: the ideational (the expression of ideas), the interpersonal (the expression of social relationships), and the textual (the way these are encoded in the grammar of a spoken or written text). Field is expressed particularly within the text through patterns of transitivity, tenor through mood and modality, and mode through forms of cohesion, deixis, lexical continuity, and patterns of voice and theme (Halliday 1983 pp 64 and 143-5). This process is regulated by principles for the organisation of social meaning which are ultimately derived from the social structure (op cit p125). For Halliday, then, children are inducted, through language interactions within particular socialising contexts, into a social semiotic language system which both encodes and constructs the social structure, and 'the infinitely complex meaning potential which is what we call the culture' (Halliday 1978 p5).

However, although Halliday talks in terms of moving from an intrapersonal to an interpersonal focus in order to understand the social aspects of language (op cit p12-16), because of his retention of an individualistic view of child development and a Saussurean division of system and text, he has to do this through generating increasingly complex theories about how the different parts of the system relate to each other. In my view Hallidayan theory cannot fully address the functions and meaning of specific examples of language use, because of this emphasis on system and text, which misses some of the more subtle and dynamic aspects of social interaction and context. I have however drawn on his general idea that social features are linguistically encoded, and I look in detail at some aspects of this within my data, for instance, the 10-12 year olds' use of modality, and the ways in which their different framings of other people's voices can convey their own attitude to the propositional content of reported

speech, and towards the reported speakers. At this level, in fact, it becomes difficult to separate the ideational from the interpersonal, since modality refers to the expression of truth in terms of possibility or probability (thus relating to ideational content), as well as to the expression of obligation and permission (which suggest a social relationship) (Wales 1989). Although Halliday's system-orientated categories have provided a useful general perspective for my research, therefore, they cannot quite capture the nuances and ambiguities in which I am most interested in children's talk, particularly in relation to their provisional and negotiated expressions of agency and knowledge.

### **The ethnography of communication**

While Halliday developed Malinowski's notion of 'context of situation' into the concepts of tenor, field and mode, which could be used to explain textual realisations of the language system in specific contexts, the 'context of situation' was also taken up in a rather different way by a group of American linguistic anthropologists, who had found little in traditional Saussurean structuralism or Chomskian linguistics to explain the relationships between language, culture and meaning across different ethnographic contexts. In the early 1970s Hymes proposed that there should be a second descriptive science of language, in addition to linguistics. He suggested this would change the frame of reference from the linguistic system to the speech community, the units of analysis from grammatical units to speech events, and the methodological approach from the analysis of linguistic relationships within an abstract system to a study of language in use, situated in 'the flux and pattern of communicative events'. (1977 p5.). He called this new approach the 'ethnography of communication'. Hymes argued that in order to understand the

meaning and function of a single utterance, or speech act, we need to look at how it is embedded within a particular speech event, which in turn occurs within a particular speech situation. The utterance or act draws on these different contextual layers to constitute meaning. An example Hymes gives is a joke (speech act) told within a conversation (speech event) at a party (speech situation). Beyond the outer layer of the speech situation are the shared values of a particular speech community, which Hymes defines as 'a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech' (1977 p51). He suggests every cultural community has its own conventions concerning 'ways of speaking' in particular contexts, and a competent speaker has to know these conventions, as well as the grammar of the language he or she is using. Hymes argues that in addition to Chomsky's grammatical competence, children have to acquire communicative competence: to learn 'when to speak, when not... what to speak about with whom, when, where and in what manner' (1972).

Hymes suggests a more detailed codification of the different components of communicative events than Halliday's field, tenor and mode, with more emphasis on local social and cultural contextualisation and meanings. Attacking, as Volosinov and Malinowski did, the oversimplification of the Saussurean transmission model of speaker, message and listener, Hymes identifies sixteen components of a speech act: message form and content, setting (time and place), scene (cultural definition of the occasion), speaker, addresser, hearer or receiver or audience, addressee, purposes-outcomes, purposes-goals, key (tone, manner and spirit, including modality), channel (oral, written, telegraphic and so on), form of speech (code, dialect, style), norms of interaction, norms of interpretation, genres (for example poem, prayer, curse) (Hymes



1977). Although Hymes greatly extended the notion of social context, the influence of structural linguistics is still evident in this focus on 'components' and 'rules', even if these are reconceptualised in more explicitly social terms as 'norms'. His analysis of communication problematises Saussure's 'speaker' and 'listener' roles, particularly in relation to contextual variables, but his actor-orientated approach does not really question the individualistic focus of the Saussurean communication model. However, subsequent work in the ethnography of communication has moved on to a more interactional and dynamic conception of communication and discourse (see below), and Hymes' emphasis on the need to analyse language use in relation to emic perspectives, and social and cultural practice, has been fundamental to the development of work in this tradition.

Starting from actual language interactions situated in 'the flux and pattern of communicative events' rather than from a systemic view of language, Hymes foregrounds context in a way which I have found especially useful. In particular I have drawn on his description of the different contextual layers of an utterance to look at how meanings invoked within and between speech acts, speech events and speech situations, interact to produce indeterminacies and ambiguities in terms of meaning and purpose, which are creatively drawn on by both speakers and listeners. Similarly, in relation to children's invoking of other voices, I have found it useful to see the contextual connotations which these voices bring with them in terms of Hymes' layers, mapping his analysis on to Bakhtin and Volosinov's ideas about reported speech (see Section 2 below). Hymes' point that an absent source whose words are repeated has an important influence on a language interaction, (Hymes 1977 p56), has particular relevance for my consideration of the children's use of reported speech.



Gumperz (1982a and 1982b) develops Hymes' notion of the speech community in relation to the language repertoires of individual speakers, and reformulates his concept of communicative competence in interactional terms (Schiffrin 1994 p101). Gumperz is particularly interested in analysing instances of 'cross-cultural' communication between people ostensibly speaking the same language, but coming from different speech communities. He shows that although these people may share the same basic vocabulary and grammar, there are subtle aspects of language use, 'signalling mechanisms such as intonation, speech rhythm, and choice among lexical, phonetic, and syntactic options' (1982a p16), which people from different backgrounds use in rather different ways in interpreting each other's speech. The resulting misunderstandings, Gumperz suggests, can contribute to inequalities in power and status, and to racial and ethnic stereotyping. Gumperz calls these signalling mechanisms 'contextualisation cues'. They relate what is said to assumed background knowledge or contextual presuppositions, and also to related situated inferences about a current communicative activity or speech event and about the other speaker's illocutionary intentions. Gumperz sees contextualisation cues as critical in interpersonal communication, since they enable people to 'rely on indirect inferences which build on background assumptions about context, interactive goals, and interpersonal relations to derive frames in terms of which they can interpret what is going on (1982a p2).

Although I am not looking at cross-cultural communication in my own research, I have used Gumperz's work on contextualisation cues in my analysis of children's negotiations of understanding at the micro-level, in combination with Goffman's more sociological notion of interpretative frames, described below.

## Participant frames

Hymes' analysis of the contextual constitution of meaning, and of the notions of speaker and listener, and Gumperz's account of situational inferences and contextualisation cues, are developed along slightly different, but I would suggest complementary, lines in the work of the sociologist Goffman. Goffman was working on a parallel intellectual project, to create a separate branch of sociology that would start from actual concrete instances of interaction and, through their analysis, 'uncover the informing, constitutive rules of everyday behaviour' (Goffman 1974 p5). He suggests looking at the context of particular utterances in relation to the way they are framed by speakers. In order to make sense of any interaction, he argues that participants use 'frames', or schemata of interpretation available to members of a particular society. These frames, which structure the way people negotiate knowledge about the world and their own positions in relation to this and to each other, can be either natural and unalterable for example concerning time, or social and malleable for example concerning cultural values. Different people may have rather different frames for a shared event (for example one person sees it as an argument and the other as a joke), frames can be broken, or disputed. Frames can also be transformed through 'keying' a different interpretation of what is going on, for example signalling that something is a joke, an accident, a misunderstanding, play-acting or a deception, or through engineering or 'fabricating' a particular interpretation<sup>3</sup>. A particular event for Goffman may be nested within a series of frames, rather like Hymes' layers of sociolinguistic context,

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<sup>3</sup> Goffman's 'keying' in the sense of actively invoking a particular frame is closer to Gumperz' notion of contextualisation cues than to Hymes' use of the term, although Goffman's rekeying may well involve a change in Hymes' 'key'.

but based on 'transformations' rather than linguistic contextualisation. For example, as Goffman puts it, 'The sawing in two of a log is an untransformed, instrumental act, the doing of this to a woman before an audience is a fabrication of the event; the magician, alone, trying out his equipment, is keying a construction, as is he who provides the direction in a book of magic, as am I in discussing the matter in terms of frame analysis' (1986 p157).

Goffman carries the deconstruction of Saussure's speaker-listener model rather further than Hymes, arguing that the 'production format' of an utterance involves three different kinds of 'speaker': the animator or 'sounding box', the author or 'agent who scripts the lines' and the principal or 'party to whose position the words attest' (1981 p226). Listeners fall into two main categories: those who are ratified, that is the addressed recipient and the rest of the official audience, and those who are unratiſied: unofficial bystanders or over-hearers and eavesdroppers. Goffman thus offers a way into looking at the different kinds of voices, commitment, and interactions which may be part of a particular conversational exchange.

Goffman is particularly interested in the dramaturgical aspects of self-presentation, and tends to focus on individuals' performance in specific encounters, in order to identify a series of procedures that may be used across situations. He does not address the influence of intertextual elements within encounters which link them to the longer stretches of activity and interactions within which an encounter is embedded, and he does not discuss the playing out of structural issues like class, gender or race within specific encounters. Goffman (1974 p.14) acknowledges that because he is talking about individual actors and not about social organisation or structure he does not address issues of power. In his later work, however, Goffman develops the

notion of particular speaker positions or 'footings', which has been fruitful for researchers looking at negotiations of power at the micro-level in conversation. Goffman suggests that frames are associated with a 'participative framework', established through an utterance opening up 'an array of structurally differentiated possibilities' (1981 p137). In natural talk, where people are constantly manoeuvring to establish themselves in a more powerful position, there are frequent changes of frame and footing which involve 'a change in our alignment to ourselves and others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance' (ibid p128). In my own research, I have drawn on Goffman's concepts of frame and footing at this micro-level to look at the ways children are negotiating their own positions within conversational exchanges, and at how their management of frames contributes to their interactional negotiations. In the same way as the relations between Hymes' layers of sociolinguistic context can provide a creative array of possible meanings and ambiguity, the emergent aspects of context generated by children's invoking of different frames can also contribute to the dynamic, provisional negotiation and renegotiation of knowledge and identity.



## Children's language practices

Hymes' ideas have been extensively drawn on by a number of ethnographic researchers interested in the relationship between children's home language experience and their educational attainment at school. Philips (1972), Michaels (1981) and Heath (1983) all show how a close analysis of 'ways of speaking' can lead to insights about children's language use which have important implications for their educational experience. Their accounts are driven by a desire to explain the ways in which some children's language use is different from that expected in the classroom (but is not, these authors would claim, deficient). In my own research I am not explicitly comparing home and school uses of language- in fact I would argue that children's language experience in school has been treated in a rather monolithic way in the research literature, being defined typically in terms of teacher-pupil dialogue, both in studies of ethnic minority children and in the more general field of education (eg Edwards and Furlong 1978, Edwards and Mercer 1987). Children's school language experience, as I shall show in this thesis, encompasses a far wider variety of practices across different contexts than what has been traditionally termed 'classroom language', which refers to only a very small proportion of their interactions over the school day. Looking at the whole range of children's language experience in school, the contrast between community and school language practices is therefore not as sharp as the literature would suggest. However, Michaels, Phillips and Heath have provided an important body of evidence which documents children's actual language practices, and extends understanding of how the meanings and function of language are tied up with social practices, relationships and values.

Michaels (1981) uses a mixture of ethnographic observation and conversation analysis to focus on 'sharing time', which she sees as a key gate-keeping speech event in the infant classroom. She shows that there is a clash of conversational styles between the teacher and those pupils (mainly African-American girls) who use a 'topic-associating' rather than a 'topic-centred' approach in relating their experiences to the class. Although she does not explore the meaning and function of these children's language use within their home community, Michaels highlights the particularity of classroom language practices, and how different practices organise experience and communication in different ways. Phillips (1972) in her study of Native American children's talk in the classroom does extend her analysis outside the school. Drawing on Goffman, she uses the concept of 'participant structures' to describe the different aspects of interactional rules which children from the Warm Springs Indian Reservation bring to school. She suggests that the children's extreme reluctance to participate in certain kinds of classroom talk, and their preference for others, is related to community beliefs about how people should relate to each other, the constitution of authority, and the nature of learning. For instance, in the classroom children responded negatively to the teacher's control of their contributions and talk, and to situations where they were being asked to 'perform' in front of others. But when they were asked to work on a project cooperatively in small groups, then they collaborated very effectively, and talked together with great concentration in the course of their work. For the Warm Springs children, it was not just a case of having to learn new vocabulary, or particular kinds of question and answer routines in the classroom, but rather being faced with unfamiliar ways of using language with others, in other words with different participant structures.

Michaels and Phillips both examine a mismatch between the communicative styles of children's home communities and those used in school. It is suggested that this mismatch makes it more difficult for some children to achieve educational success. Particularly crucial to doing well at school is the acquisition of particular kinds of literacy practices. How pre-school children learn particular ways of relating to texts and narratives and of being a reader is a central theme in Heath's study of young children's experience of language and literacy practices in three contrasting communities in the Piedmont Carolinas (1982, 1983). Two aspects of her work have particularly influenced my own project. First, her ethnographic approach to the study of cultural transmission involves detailed accounts of how language is tied up with other aspects of social and cultural practice in children's lives. Second, she shows how literacy is always embedded within oral language, and that what she calls 'literacy events' always have social and cultural significance.

Heath contrasts the different practices within three local communities only a few miles apart: Trackton, a black working class community recently turned from farming to work in the textile mills, Roadville, a white working class mill community, and Maintown, where the black and white townspeople live who hold power in the school and workplace. She suggests that children from the black and white urban middle class families in Maintown learn how to give the 'what' explanations, reason explanations and affective commentaries in relation to texts which are valued in school through their experience of bedtime stories with their carers. Children from Roadville, where religious practices include an emphasis on written scriptures, come to school with experience of number and alphabet books, Bible stories and real life stories about children like themselves, but see texts as



inflexible records of 'the truth' which should not be played about with. They do well initially at school, but fall back later when they are expected to imaginatively relate ideas in a story to their own experience, and to take knowledge learned in one context and shift it to another. Children from Trackton are unfamiliar with story books, but skilled in oral story telling and in performing and interacting with an audience. In school these children are faced with unfamiliar kinds of questions about texts which ask for labels, attributes and discrete features of objects and events in isolation from the context. In Trackton, people ask questions about whole events or objects and their uses, causes and effects; answers usually involve telling a story, describing a situation, or making comparisons with other events and objects known to the audience. Trackton children's abilities to metaphorically link two situations and recreate scenes are not tapped in the early years of school- in fact, they can often be a nuisance to the teacher. By the time the Trackton children reach the stage in their school career when reasons, explanations and effective statements call for the creative comparison of two or more situations, according to Heath, it is too late for many of them, who have not picked up the particular kinds of composition and comprehension skills needed to translate their analogical abilities into an acceptable channel.

The bed-time story is an example of what Heath terms a literacy event, that is, where the talk between people revolves around a written text. She refers back to Anderson, Teale and Estrada's 1980 definition of this as 'any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role' (p59), and uses a Hymesian approach (focusing on 'social rules') to expand on the social and cultural aspects of the event: 'Literacy events have social interactional rules which regulate the type and



amount of *talk* about what is written, and define ways in which *oral language* reinforces, denies, extends or sets aside the written material. Just as speech events occur in certain speech situations and contain speech acts (Hymes 1972), so literacy events are rule-governed, and their different situations of occurrence determine their internal rules for talking and interpreting and interacting around the piece of writing' (Heath 1983 p 386). She cites as a typical literacy event in Trackton the hour-long discussion of a letter offering Lillie Mae's two year old son a place in a daycare program. Friends and neighbours discuss and offer interpretations of the letter's meaning in relation to their own experience, and Heath argues that 'reading' in this case is not a silent individual act, but is collaboratively accomplished through talk. Although Heath suggests that this oral and social kind of reading is particularly prevalent in Trackton, rather than in the two other communities, and contrasts it with the classroom practices children face at school, I shall argue in Chapter Eight that in my research many texts in the classroom are in fact read in a very similar way to Lillie Mae's letter. I am not suggesting direct parallels between the early literacy experience of any of the communities Heath studied and that of the children in my own research. However, like her, I am looking for recurring patterns across different language and literacy events, (in my case those which the 10-12 year olds I studied experienced over the school day), in terms of particular uses of language, particular interactional relationships, and particular ways of orientating to texts and knowledge.

Studies like those of Michaels, Phillips and Heath have been criticised for focusing too exclusively on the detailed micro-analysis of local situations without sufficiently addressing how broader structural forces are expressed in or resisted through these local practices. For

example Rosen (1985) has pointed out that Heath never considers the relationship between the 'ways with words' which she documents and issues of institutionalised racism. In spite of their own explicit rejection of a 'language deprivation' view of children from lower class or ethnic minority communities, researchers like Heath, Michaels and Phillips have also been accused of producing stereotypical accounts of language practices within particular communities which can be easily appropriated into the language deprivation model by educationalists. As Edelsky (1991 p.7) points out, ideas about the equality of all languages and varieties, and a demonstration of their complexity and of the prodigious creativity of speakers in any language variety can also be used to mask historically produced inequalities between languages and language varieties in terms of power, prestige or function. Similarly, Van Dijk (1990) suggests that because many discourse studies within anthropology and linguistics during the 1970s and early 1980s were typically associated with 'apolitical, micro-level studies of culture', (p 7) the involvement of societal, political and cultural dimensions in the processes of social contexts was largely neglected.

Michaels, Phillips and Heath, who treat the meaning of children's language experience as closely tied up with social relationships, activities and values, have helped to extend and develop Malinowski's concept of 'context of situation' and Hymes' ideas about 'ways of speaking'. Currently, the unifying principle in studies of the ethnography of speaking is, according to Bauman and Sherzer (1991), a belief that 'no sphere of social or cultural life is fully comprehensible apart from speaking as an instrument of its constitution' (pxi). In my own research, I focus, like Heath, on language events, but, because of my continuous recordings, I am able to contextualise them more fully

than she does, within participants' ongoing communicative activity. When referring to recurring patterns in children's use of language, I have used the term 'language practices', to acknowledge the contextualisation of language activities in institutions and settings, and also their implication in wider structural and cultural processes<sup>4</sup>. Although the term 'discourse' is now widely used within anthropology and other disciplines to indicate a sociopolitical view of language (see discussion later in this chapter), I have still found it helpful to use the term 'language practices', with its suggestion of more specific agents and activities, to build up a language of description for the patterns in my data. Thus, for example, I would refer to children's habitual use of narrative to relate personal experience as a language practice.

My data, both from the continuous recordings and from the interviews, is full of children's anecdotes and stories, and I shall now move on to discuss my theoretical approach to analysing this particular language practice, in more detail.

### **Conversational Narrative**

Narrative has long been seen as a centrally important way of communicating and reviewing experience. Jerome Bruner (1986) suggests that story-telling is the major way in which we account for our actions and the events we experience, and that 'our sensitivity to narrative provides the major link between our own sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us' (p69). There is now a substantial literature on the role of conversational story-telling in accounting for actions and experience, relating to others and exploring cultural values (Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972; Polanyi,

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<sup>4</sup> cf Grillo's notion (1986) of 'communicative practices' (quoted in Street 1995 p 162-3)



1985; Bruner, J. 1986; Bauman, 1986: and Riesmann, 1993). Research with children and adolescents suggests that they use stories to pursue and negotiate relationships with others, and to establish positions within social groups (Goodwin 1990, Shuman 1986). Studies of younger children have demonstrated that listening to and telling narratives of personal experience play an important part in children's emotional development. For instance Miller et al (1990) show how the stories adults tell in front of two to five year olds communicate particular beliefs and values about how emotions like anger and aggression should be experienced and expressed. Miller et al (1992) also found that in stories told collaboratively by five to seven year-olds, children presented personal characteristics, for example bravery, through comparing their own actions or reactions with those of another child in the situation in the story. This comparison was sometimes made, or corroborated, by the second story-teller. Research would suggest, therefore, that conversational narrative structures are particularly rich in their potential for simultaneously and economically fulfilling a number of social and cognitive functions. For children in particular, in Vygotskian terms, experience is mediated through language in narratives, and exposure to and participation in narrative practices helps develop tools for communicating and evaluating knowledge and identity interactively, and for establishing personal continuity across time and space. Narratives also contain messages about appropriate behaviour, and ways of conducting relationships.

Although I have treated the many stories and anecdotes in my data as emerging from, and contextualised within, specific conversations, I have also found it useful to draw on literature using a more formalist approach to narrative structure and meaning. As Rosen (1988) points



out, most influential theories about narrative (for example Genette 1980, Barthes 1975) are based on written, not oral, sources. Even Propp's famous structuralist analysis of one hundred and fifteen Russian folktales is based on a printed collection of the tales, not on their live performance. One could also add Bakhtin to Rosen's list; Bakhtin's theories about heteroglossia and the dialogic nature of language, which I shall be drawing on to analyse children's narratives, come from his study of the novel (Bakhtin 1981 and 1984).

Classical theory focuses mainly on the narrated text, and the various ways in which this transforms the basic material of events, characters and settings into a particular kind of story; thus the Russian Formalist distinction between 'fabula' (the basic material) and 'sjuzet' (its treatment in the narration), and the similar French structuralist distinction between 'histoire' and 'discours'. These theories focus on authors and texts rather than on audiences and performances, and they are not much concerned with the actual performance of narratives in specific contexts. However, as I shall explain in Chapter Seven, I have found that formal analysis of the structure and meaning of children's conversational stories can throw light not just on their internal consistency, but also on quite subtle aspects of collaborative and dialogic aspects of meaning-making through narrative, which are encoded within its structure. I shall be drawing on Genette's notion of focalisation (ie the point of view from which a story is being narrated, which may change in quite subtle ways in the course of the narration) and, more substantially, on Bakhtin's theories about reported speech. But because I am also interested in the specific contexts of story performance, I also need to examine the relationship between the text of the story and the narrating event. Although I rarely witnessed the original events which provided the contents of these stories, I am also

interested in why children choose particular kinds of events and experiences as the subjects of their narration. These choices raise issues about how stories relate not just to their immediate conversational context, but also to the children's wider cultural experience.

An increasing amount of work on narrative events (as opposed to narrative texts) has emerged over the last thirty years from sociolinguists and ethnographers with a particular interest in language in use, in different communities. In a number of seminal studies, Labov (1967 and 1972), argues that a consistent pattern of narrative structure is found in the ordinary, everyday, oral narratives of personal experience, and that this structure can be analysed in relation to two main functions. First, conversational narrative has a referential function in that it recapitulates experience in temporally sequenced events. In terms of this function, Labov focuses, like traditional narrative theorists, on the relation between the text (in this case oral), and the sequentially related events it recounts. He argues that conversational narratives use a recurring framework, consisting of five sections: abstract, orientation, complication, resolution and coda (discussed in more detail in relation to my own data in Chapter Seven). Second, Labov shows that narrative has an evaluative function, since the way a story is told is shaped not just by the past events it recounts, but also by the narrator's reasons in choosing to tell it. Thus when Labov asked male adolescent African-Americans to tell him about dangerous situations or fights they had experienced, they related stories which portrayed the danger as impressively as possible, and highlighted their own courage. Although the evaluative function would seem to focus on the relation between the text and the narrating event, however, Labov has a fairly limited

concept of conversational context, because his research was carried out on stories elicited in interviews specifically designed for that purpose (I shall discuss the evaluative functions of narratives in more detail in Chapter Seven).

Since Labov's work, other researchers looking at spontaneous narratives have extended notions of how context shapes the structure and content of conversational stories. For Goffman, and Goodwin (discussed below) who draws on his work, these narratives provide frames of experience incorporating particular positions for characters, and therefore offer an important way of expressing and organising social structure. Polanyi (1985) and Heath (1983) (see above) show that what counts as a story at all, as well as the manner in which stories are related, varies across different cultural and social groups. For instance, Heath found that while the residents of white working class Roadville stressed the importance of accuracy and truth in stories, which tended to reaffirm the puritanical moral values of the community, the best storytellers in nearby black working-class Trackton were seen as those who could engage their audience's interest in outlandish fictional narratives. Heath concludes 'For Roadville, Trackton's stories would be lies; for Trackton, Roadville's stories would not even count as stories' (Heath 1983 p189).

There has been a growing interest in ethnography of communication research in the relationship between narrative performance, and communicative context (Finnegan 1992). Thus Bauman (1986), examines the relationship between text, narrated event and narrating event in the stories of middle aged men in a small Texas town, through an analysis of their use of reported speech (which he sees as the most important device fusing narrated and narrating event), expressive lying and fabrication, metanarration and the poetics of



performance. Bauman points out that in addition to recounting experience, narrative can be 'an instrument for obscuring, hedging, confusing, exploring or questioning what went on, that is, for keeping the coherence or comprehensibility of narrated events open to question' (p5-6). He argues that these stories convey attitudes towards social problems, and strategies for dealing with them, thus serving to alleviate moral conflict.

Although there has been a tendency within the ethnography of communication tradition to set story telling within a category of 'artistic uses' (for example Sherzer 1987), or 'verbal arts' (Finnegan 1992), my own data from everyday informal language includes artistic uses like narrative, which are nevertheless closely integrated within ongoing communication. I prefer therefore to view artistic usage as permeating ordinary talk to a greater or lesser extent (Finnegan acknowledges this kind of permeation at one end of her continua of verbal performances (op cit p101-2), and Tannen (1989) explores the conversational use of artistic forms in more detail). My approach therefore is close to that of Shuman (1988), who argues like Bauman that in order to understand the importance and meaning of the stories about fights told by the 12-16 year old girls she studied, we need to look at the relationships between these stories, the context of their telling, and the events being recounted. She treats this story telling as a part of conversation rather than as artistic performance. Shuman suggests that a key issue is who is entitled to tell what to whom; there is also a shared understanding about what is worth telling, and when it is appropriate for a certain person to tell a certain story. But these rules are openly disputed, and constantly renegotiated. Shuman shows how the boundaries between event, story and narrative context become blurred, because the stories are



themselves an intricate part of the process of ongoing disputes. For example the report of a fight may be more socially significant than the event, and may itself initiate a new disagreement. When a story is challenged as a lie, it may not actually be the contents which are the focus of the challenge, but the right of the story teller to tell that story, which may represent an invasion of privacy, a breaking of a promise of secrecy, or a lack of discretion or modesty.

My own analysis (in Chapter Seven) will draw on Labov's notion of the evaluative function of narrative, but will also use additional ideas from other studies of conversational narrative, and from Bakhtin/Volosinov to order to extend treatment of the dynamic, dialogical and intertextual features of children's stories. I shall argue that the evaluative functions of narratives are realised dialogically, and that understanding and knowledge are themselves provisional, open, and in the process of being negotiated. In addition, I shall claim that children's use of reported speech, as well as being centrally important in fusing the narrated and narrating event (Bauman *op cit*), is a crucial evaluative strategy, far more important than Labov's analysis would suggest. As Besnier (1992) points out, linguistic attention has focused on grammatical aspects of the construction of reported speech, rather than on its meaning in linguistic performance. Using the ideas of Bakhtin and Volosinov discussed later in the next section below, I shall show that reported speech drives both the referential and evaluative functions of narrative, and that it provides children with ways of exploring and negotiating a range of evaluative perspectives, at a number of different levels. In both theoretical and methodological terms, reported speech is the articulating link between the more formal aspects of my analysis of textual features, and my

analysis of narrative as part of a contextualised, interactive, dynamic process of meaning making.

### **An ideological model of literacy**

Earlier above, I discussed Heath's use of the term 'literacy events' (cf Hymes 'language events'), to refer to particular activities in which literacy has a role. Drawing on ethnography of communication studies like Heath's, the terms 'literacy events' and 'literacy practices' have been taken up more broadly within the emerging field of social literacy studies. While literacy events are specific observable activities, the term 'literacy practices' is used by some writers as a rather more abstract concept, to refer additionally to the shared mental constructs which people use to guide their behaviour in events. Thus Barton (1991) defines literacy practices as 'the general cultural ways of utilizing literacy that people draw upon in a literacy event' (Barton op cit p5). For instance, he explains, writing a note for the milkman is a literacy event, while deciding to do it, finding the relevant implements, and leaving it in a particular place at a particular time involves drawing on literacy practices. Similarly, Street (1995) sees literacy practices as incorporating both events, and "'folk models" of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them' (Street op cit p 162). In my own case, my collection and analysis of data has been strongly directed by the view that the function and meaning of children's uses of language and literacy are closely tied up with cultural values, and with the social practices in which they are embedded. I focus on literacy events, and, because of the level of my analysis, I use the term 'literacy practices' with a slightly differently emphasis from Barton and Street, to refer to recurring patterns which emerge in children's use of language across different literacy events (for me, a literacy practice is a specific kind

of language practice). Thus children's frequent collaborative negotiation of written instructions in relation to classroom tasks is a 'literacy practice'. Literacy practices certainly reflect and instantiate folk models and ideological preconceptions, but as I am focusing at a more empirical level of description than Street and Barton are in their theory- building, I use the term 'practice' to refer to patterns of behaviour which are deducible from the data. Rather than introduce a new term to describe my own level of analysis, and risk the reification which I would suggest is a danger in Hymes' list of components and norms, I prefer to use an existing term, but with a particular emphasis.

Street's discussion of the ideological aspects of literacy is important, in redressing the rather apolitical perspective of many of the earlier ethnography of communication studies. Street (1984) calls for the replacement of what he calls the 'autonomous model' of literacy by an 'ideological model'. His own fieldwork in Iran confirmed the findings of other researchers, for example Scribner and Cole (1981), that rather than acquiring a monolithic capacity of 'literacy' which then opens the way to further cognitive, social and commercial development as Goody and Watt (1968), Goody (1977), and Olson (1977) have suggested, people tend to develop specific literacy skills in relation to the particular literacy practices in which they engage. These practices have a strong ideological component, in other words their meaning and function are related to the exercise of power and the assignment of value to particular activities and beliefs (Street 1993a). Because reading and writing are always socially and ideologically embedded, Street argues that the autonomous model which treats literacy as a set of neutral skills that people can acquire and then apply is actually just another kind of ideological model. Thus it privileges particular kinds



of texts (for example the essay), and conceptualises literacy as involving detached, analytical, individualised activity. The autonomous model has been associated with the belief that becoming literate will give people the analytical, logical and critical skills needed for effective participation in the economic and scientific life of the developed world (Street 1984), and, because this model is the dominant one in the West, it has tended to underpin most literacy teaching both at school and in Western influenced adult literacy campaigns. But Street stresses that 'the way in which people actually learn literacy is already part of an ideology....any form of literacy practice is already imbued with what that literacy is, (with particular) power relations' (1993b).

Alongside the official literacy practices sanctioned by the autonomous model are unofficial vernacular practices. For Street, adopting an ideological model of literacy involves a recognition of all literacy practices and their embeddedness in social activities involving not only particular cultural values as in the ethnography of communication tradition, but also power relationships. In order to understand the meaning and function of literacy in particular contexts, one needs to examine the historical, cultural and social factors influencing the practice and effects of reading and writing, and how they are valued. I shall draw on Street's work in analysing the official and unofficial classroom literacy practices of the children in my study.

In his more recent work, Street explores the relationship of literacy practices to aspects of self and identity, arguing that 'what it is to be a person, to be moral and to be human in specific cultural contexts is frequently signified by the kinds of literacy practices in which a person is engaged' (1993a). He quotes Besnier's work (1989) to



suggest that people may express rather different facets of their personality through different literacy practices: for instance Besnier showed that letter writing for the Nukulaelae islanders he studied involved the expression of much higher levels of affect than did most oral interactions. I shall be discussing my own findings about the relationship between literacy practices and identity in Chapter Eight.

Since the mid-80s there has been a considerable development of research employing what Street would term an ideological model of literacy. Issues of power and identity are central for instance in the work of Shuman (1986, 93), Sola and Bennett (1986), Rockhill (1987) and Saxena (1993). As I mentioned above, in my discussion of narrative, Shuman studied junior high school students' vernacular oral and written texts, particularly their stories about fights, which were an important topic for discussion. She uses recordings of the fight stories, and the adolescents' letters, notes and diaries to argue that their significance for the teenagers lies not in the texts themselves, but in the ways they are used as part of the negotiation of rights within relationships, whether among students or between students and the school authorities. For Shuman the study of literacy is always a study of entitlement- who is entitled to tell or convey which stories to whom - and 'the use of written or spoken communication involves understanding, negotiating, and playing with the social constraints and privileges accorded to both (*oral and written*) channels of communication' (1986 p19).

Sola and Bennett (1986) studied the teaching of writing in three classes of Puerto Rican and African-American students in an East Harlem school. They found that practices in the three classes offered different opportunities for the legitimation of students' own community discourse style, and therefore elicited quite different

modes of participation. They describe the struggle between the official school instructional discourse with its fixed curriculum goals and knowledge and the more interactive, provisional and contemporaneous discourse of the local community, in terms of Bakhtin's ideas about the struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces within language. They suggest that this struggle is in effect between 'the productive forces of consciousness formation' of the school, and of the community. From this perspective, asking students to enter into official school discourse may entail their participation in those very discursive practices that denigrate or marginalise their own community identity.

The deconstruction of what Street calls the autonomous model of literacy is also an important aspect of Rockhill's study (1987) of a group of Spanish immigrant women's experience of literacy in the United States, where she critiques the idea that acquiring a single literacy will have predefined results for individuals. She argues that the assumption that literacy gives access to power in public spheres of national, economic and political activity, or that power is 'out there' to be appropriated or resisted, has little relevance for the women in her study who live out material, racial and gender inequality in a much more complicated way within the home. The desire of these women to become literate is ambivalent because although literacy seems to offer an escape from domestic oppression, it also threatens their current family relationships and social world. Drawing on Foucault's ideas about power and discourse (which are discussed later in this section, below), Rockhill argues that power is best viewed not as a monolithic outside force, but as lived internally and, like race, gender and class, as an integral part of people's subjectivity.

The ways in which power, and aspects of identity like gender, are expressed and constructed through language and literacy practices also has an important historical dimension, both in terms of the individuals involved, and the practices themselves. Saxena (1993) shows that in a British Panjabi community the meanings, values and functions of literacy practices are affected not just by the histories of the individuals involved, but also by the histories of the languages they are using, and the political and religious associations of these languages in that particular context. He argues that through their involvement in various literacy practices in different languages, the people in his study manage multiple religious and secular identities, some of which are complementary, and some competing. Saxena's emphasis on the importance of history as a dimension of the cultural and political context of literacy is echoed in a number of broader studies by historians, for example Viswanathan's analysis (1987) of the social formation of a canon of English literature in India, and Graff's review (1982) of the relationship of conceptions of literacy in the West to the State, the Church and commercial activity over the last three hundred years.

### **The interactional construction of context**

While ethnographic studies of language and literacy are now drawing on more complex notions of cultural and historical context to develop poststructuralist, processual concepts of literacy and identity, work in a different but related field of language research has been reconceptualising context at the micro-level as dynamic, and emergent. Conversational analysts, coming from a sociological research tradition emerging out of ethnomethodology and influenced by Goffman, have focused on the social organisation of talk within specific encounters, looking particularly at sequential organization: turntaking,



openings and closings, and how topics are developed (Sacks et al 1974, Atkinson and Heritage 1984). Wanting to minimise the possibility of speculative inferences by researchers, conversation analysts claim that analysis of what is happening within an interaction and of participants' world views must be grounded in, and can only be revealed by, the conversation text, since this will show what is salient to the actual people involved. From this point of view, talk builds social organisation within face-to-face interaction, and context is not a series of background cultural and historical features, but is constructed by the interactants within the course of an exchange. Utterances are seen as indexical, invoking particular aspects of social relations and of prior utterances, so that 'the significance of any speaker's communicative action is doubly contextual in being both *context-shaped and context renewing* ' (Heritage 1984 p242). In addition to the interactive construction of context, many conversation analysts would see social relationships and participants' identities as being more or less exclusively constructed through social dialogue.

Working within the conversation analysis tradition (and drawing on Goffman), Goodwin (1980, 1990) studied a group of African-American children of various ages who played together in a Philadelphia street. Following the conversation analysts' approach that evidence of culture and social organisation comes from the talk itself, Goodwin shows that the different ways in which the boys and girls in her study tell stories about each other to resolve disputes are part of the different ways in which they organise their social groups. While boys played in groups with hierarchies and those higher up issued clear directives like 'Gimme the pliers' (1980p158), the girls organised in more cooperative groups and made more indirect suggestions such as 'Maybe we can slice them like that' (1980 p166). Boys' stories were



told in the context of direct verbal confrontations challenging the group hierarchy; for instance a boy would tell a story about an opponent to his face, trying to draw the other boys listening onto his side, in an effort to change the balance of power in the group. Girls, in contrast, organised friendship around inclusion and exclusion and tended to exchange stories about other girls in their absence. Thus Goodwin argues that the children in her study use stories to construct and reconstruct social organisation on an ongoing basis; the stories provided an arena for each gender group to negotiate concerns central to their notion of social organisation.

Because of Goodwin's reliance on Goffman and conversation analysis, her view is restricted to the micro-context, and remarkably little sense of other layers of context come through in the account, or of how the content and form of children's language practices in the street relate to other aspects of their lives, or to the different social practices within their community. A number of critics have questioned whether conversation analysts really can restrict context to that which is invoked within the talk. Mehan (1991) argues that conversation analysts have given little attention to some semantic and pragmatic aspects of language use, and that the syntactic analysis of conversation structure cannot always capture the situated relevance of macro-structures, or the participants' orientations to broader patterns of discourse organisation. He argues that, for instance, bureaucratic talk within institutions such as schools, hospitals and courtrooms is frequently orientated towards policies drawn up elsewhere, but which are not explicitly invoked, and that the actual meaning and function of the talk can only be understood by reference to the ways 'distal' as well as 'proximal' circumstances influence the course of interaction and the work of the organisation. Similarly,

Cicourel (1992) argues that the analysis of local language interactions needs to be located within the wider context of social activities familiar to both participants and investigator. There is interpenetration of communicative contexts, and knowledge of prior social activities is often needed in order to understand, for example, why a particular person's views hold more sway than another's on a specific occasion.

### **Discourse, knowledge and subjectivity**

Within the ethnography of communication area, influenced by developments within linguistics, there has more recently been a move towards conceptualising social aspects of language within a socially and culturally constituted notion of discourse. As Besnier (unpublished) points out, definitions of discourse range from its more formalist conception in sociolinguistics as speech and writing beyond the sentence level, to Foucault's notion of a historically situated symbolic order (discussed below). Besnier suggests the most valuable definition for anthropology is a hybrid one: 'the relationship between linguistic practices and the social and cultural world in which these practices emerge'. Similarly, Sherzer (1987) sees discourse as the 'concrete expression of language-culture relationships' and increasingly the starting point, theoretically and methodologically, for anthropological linguistic and cultural analysis, because it 'creates, recreates, modifies and fine tunes both culture and language and their intersection' (p296). Street (1995) suggests that the term 'discourse', as currently used by anthropologists, borrows from Foucault to refer to a particular complex of conceptions, classification and language use. Street points out that in contrast to the static functionalist approach implied in Malinowski's 'context of situation', the term 'discourse' acknowledges the dynamic nature of social processes, and the wider

structure of power relations. I would suggest that it is a complementary concept to those of language and literacy practices (as I use the terms), providing the broader linguistic/cultural context within which these function and have meaning.

Anthropologists (and other social theorists) have drawn particularly from Foucault's (1981) notion of 'the order of discourse', in order to address the relationship between language use in the local micro-contexts, and broader structures and cultural values. For Foucault, discourses (which include other symbolic forms as well as language) are ways of framing and sanctioning certain kinds of knowledge about the world, and social practices, thus constructing particular kinds of knowledge as 'truth', and constructing people as particular kinds of subjects. For Foucault, truth, knowledge, power and subjectivity are inextricably intertwined within discourse:

'Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.....We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth' (1980 pp131 and 93).

Foucault suggests that in modern Western European societies, 'truth' is centred on scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it, and is circulated through education and other information apparatuses. Because of the multi-circuited nature of power in the modern state, it can no longer be seen as the top-down exercise of control by rulers over their subjects, but is rather diffused throughout the whole social body; 'power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions



and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives' (op cit p39 ). In addition to delineating what is true and false, Foucault argues that discursive practices are subject to processes of 'rarefaction'. Over time, norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories become firmer, conventions for disciplines more inflexible. 'Societies of discourse' preserve or produce particular discourses, circulating them internally according to rules (for example medical discourse, publishing houses/literature) (Foucault 1981). Discourses are associated with certain rules and roles for speaking subjects. Some are more closed and difficult to enter than others; often speaking subjects cannot enter a discourse unless they satisfy certain requirements (another aspect of 'rarefaction'), and there may be only a limited number of roles which they can take up within it. For instance, any education system, with its associated teacher-pupil roles and relationships, classroom groundrules and disciplinary conventions, together with the physical layout of buildings and classrooms, is 'a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the power and knowledge they carry' (op cit p64).

Within Foucault's theory, people's subjectivity is produced through their inevitable involvement in these discursive practices throughout their everyday lives, in three main ways. First, in the dividing processes of social objectification and categorisation, the human is given a social and personal identity, for example mad or sane, rich or poor (and presumably, intelligent or stupid, beautiful or ugly, and so on). Second, scientific classification creates a speaking subject in linguistics, a productive subject in economics, a 'live' subject in biology, and so on. Third, individuals can also be actively involved in turning themselves into a particular kind of subject through



'operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct' (quoted in Rabinow 1984 p11). These operations, usually mediated by an external authority figure, entail a process of self-understanding. This process of 'subjectification', as Rabinow calls it, and the dividing practices of social objectivation, are very closely related (Rabinow op cit).

Foucault provides a way of setting individual language interactions and experience within the context of discourses which organise socially labelled and sanctioned knowledge, power and subjectivity. Thus discourse is seen as a key area for investigation by researchers interested in the association of language with 'forms of societal and cultural stratification and reproduction, and with the enactment and legitimation of power' (Van Dijk 1990 p8), and for those interested in how discourse practices, and their hybridization, are related to social and cultural change (eg Fairclough 1996a). I myself, with my focus on more micro-level individual language interactions, have found Foucault's ideas about the construction of subjectivity in relation to discursive positioning particularly useful. Although Foucault discussed 'subjectification' mainly in relation to members of the dominant classes (Rabinow op cit), I would argue it is equally evident in my data from working class children. Unhappy with the top-down notions of power in some sociological studies of classroom life (see Chapter Three), I have used Foucault's notion of the capillary existence of power, lived out (as Rockhill suggests), by individuals through diverse aspects of their material everyday existence. I am also interested in Foucault's conception of low ranking 'disqualified knowledges' (Foucault 1980 p82), which are deemed naive or insufficiently elaborated, but which may reappear as potentially regenerating criticism. I would suggest that these kinds of local, specific

knowledges circulate within what Bakhtin calls the 'inwardly persuasive' discourse of everyday informal language experience, which I shall discuss in more detail in the next section, and which constitutes the main body of data for this thesis.

### **Shifting conceptions of text, context and identity**

I have shown how the traditional linguistic focus on an abstract language system and a decontextualized individual speaker has been challenged by the more social theories of language use emerging within Hallidayan sociolinguistics in Britain, and from the ethnography of communication tradition in the United States. The strength of the ethnography of communication tradition in relation to my own research is its detailed descriptions of uses of language and literacy in particular cultural settings, and the demonstration of how these are related to social practice, and to ways of taking meaning from the world. Thus the early idea of 'context of situation' was developed and language and literacy events and practices have become key units of analysis. Less attention was given to the dynamic and inconsistent or conflictual aspects of language practices within the classic accounts. For Hymes, the maturing child simply takes on the existing language practices of the community. His notion of the speech community itself is relatively homogenous, and does not address how speech communities change and merge into each other, or are cross-cut by dimensions such as age, gender or class.

More recently researchers have developed the ethnography of communication approach by using poststructuralist ideas to shift towards a stronger focus on discourse, and more fragmented and processual notions of texts and identity. Thus for Shuman the function and meaning of texts emerges from the processes of their production

and circulation, and for Street, people's identity or personhood is constructed across the various literacy practices in which they engage. At the same time, researchers working in the field of conversation analysis have developed more dynamic, interactively constructed notions of context, and dialogue can also be shown to invoke its own context and forms of social relationship in terms of Goffman's participative frameworks and, more profoundly, in relation to Foucault's concept of discourse.

In looking at how people express and develop aspects of their identity through different literacy practices, Street (1993) and Besnier (1989) draw on an anthropological literature concerning how various aspects of 'personhood' are conceptualised across different cultural groups. In Mauss' seminal 1938 anthropological essay (1985), he distinguishes between 'moi' which he sees as a person's basic psychological consciousness, shared by all human beings, and 'personne', the culturally specific notion of what it means to be human in a particular social group. As Wetherell and Maybin (1996) point out, the exact borderline between 'moi' and 'personne', and the connections between them, are not made completely clear in Mauss's essay, for example in relation to emotions, motives and consciousness. Subsequently, however, a number of anthropologists and psychologists have explored and elaborated Mauss's concepts of the self. Leinhardt (1985), for instance, claims that in contrast to the distinctions in English between physical, moral, emotional and intellectual attributes, the Dinka language (spoken by the people he studied in the Sudan) creates a less differentiated concept of the person, thus expressing what are abstract notions in English like trust, happiness or fear, much more directly through the physical matrix of the human body. Rosaldo (1984) contrasts Western notions of 'anger', associated with



frustration, and the threatening of individual rights, with the Pacific Ilongot's concept of 'liget', associated with headhunting practices and masculinity. For the Ilongot, the expression of 'liget' includes 'anger', but also energy and passion, and Rosaldo argues that people learn to identify and express their own emotions in particular ways in the context of cultural practice, and through the accounts of personal experience which circulate within particular communities.<sup>5</sup>

Kirkpatrick (1983) suggests that in any society the notion of personhood is 'a site of articulation of dominant and subordinate ideological components', and will inevitably include mutually discrepant definitions. For him the concept provides a way into investigating the articulation between the individual and the social among the Marquesan islanders whom he studied, and to understand Marquesan ideology and social structure: in his words 'how they construe their social world'.

While anthropologists have drawn on Mauss's concepts of 'moi' and 'personne' to examine cross-cultural variation in conceptions of the self, some social psychologists have drawn on another theoretical division of the self, Mead's concept of the 'I' and the 'me', to explain some aspects of the development of identity, especially during childhood. Mead is particularly interested in how children acquire the ability to take on the perspectives of others, which he sees as fundamental both to social and moral development and to the emergence of mind and all cognition. He suggests that there are three stages in the development of the child's self, each shaped by the roles and attitudes of others. (Prior to these stages the young baby is motivated by basic biological drives and instincts, but gradually

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<sup>5</sup> cf Miller et al's research (1990) on the role of narrative in young children's development of emotional expression, mentioned earlier above.



becomes used to particular sequences of behaviour and events). In the first stage, from the beginning of the acquisition of language, the child begins to learn the symbolic representations of the adult world; next, in the 'play stage', young children try out the perspectives and attitudes of others in fantasy and role play. Finally, in the 'game stage' children begin to be able to organise a number of roles simultaneously in relation to themselves, and to appreciate interrelationships between the viewpoints of a variety of others. As their social experience broadens, Mead believes that children reach a point where they can organise the combined attitudes and perspectives of people within the whole social group into a 'generalised other', which becomes an important source of internalised social control. Mead represents thought as a dialogue between the 'I', the more spontaneous, intuitive aspect of the self and the 'me', these internalised attitudes of others.

Although he considers that organising the attitudes of the child's social group into a 'generalised other' marks the full development of the self, Mead also acknowledges that the 'me' continues to be modified through dialogues with others and through our membership of new social groups during the course of our lives. His insights about the way people revise their symbolic representations of the world and ideas about themselves through interaction would suggest a more dynamic view of the self, as the 'me' becomes reconstituted through new dialogues in different contexts.

Thus researchers from different areas within the social sciences have become interested in finding ways to conceptualise the dynamic relationships between language and context, to describe and explain intertextual and intercontextual links (including the relationships between micro-level activity and macro-level social structures and

processes), and to look at how people construct identity through social interactions and practices across a range of contexts. In Section 2.3 below I shall argue that the work of the Russian sociohistorical writers can be used to develop theory in these three areas, through their use of a more ideological<sup>6</sup> conception of language and context than that employed in Western theories, and a more strongly dialogical model of language use.

### **2.3 The Russian sociohistorical approach: dialogism, heteroglossia, and the ideological nature of language**

#### **Language, context and ideology**

For Volosinov and Bakhtin, as for the ethnographers of communication, the meaning and function of language derives from the contexts of its use, defined by the Russian writers in Marxist materialist terms. Volosinov and Bakhtin's significant units of analysis, however abstractly discussed, are always derived from situated dialogue, either in everyday life, or literature (Bakhtin). Thus they focus on the utterance, reported speech, dialogism, speech performance, speech genres and social languages. Although Bakhtin was more literary theorist than practical linguist, his notions of heteroglossia, and of the centripetal and centrifugal forces within language, are also theoretically rooted not within a system/text

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<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin and Volosinov do not use the term 'ideologija', translated as 'ideology' in the classic Marxist sense of a hegemonic authoritative system of values and beliefs, but more broadly to refer to any system of values and beliefs. In their view, language is profoundly ideological, in other words its use can never be objective, but always conveys particular social and cultural assumptions, and evaluative perspectives (Emerson and Holquist 1981).

conception of language, but rather within language use, with all the potential contextual issues which this implies. In applying Bakhtin and Volosinov's conceptions of dialogism, heteroglossia and the ideological nature of language, within this thesis, I shall demonstrate that these can be operationalised in relation to empirical data from everyday spontaneous talk.

For Volosinov, the importance of understanding utterances in relation to their actual context is reflected in his reference to the 'theme' of an utterance, as distinct from its dictionary meaning. He defines 'theme' as that unique complex of meanings invoked by a word or words used at a particular moment, including their sociocultural connotations, and the current speaker's intentions in using them. Thus *'Theme is a complex dynamic system of signs that attempts to be adequate to a given instant of generative process'* (Volosinov 1986 p100). He gives a simple illustration to show the dependence of theme on what he calls the 'extraverbal context'. He describes two people sitting in an empty room, one of whom utters the single word 'well!'. Volosinov points out that structuralist linguistics can tell us nothing about the meaning of this exclamation. In order to understand it we need to know 'the common spatial purview of the interlocuters' (in this case they had just looked up at the window to see snow falling), their 'common knowledge and understanding of the situation' ( it was already May and high time for spring to come) and their 'common evaluation of that situation' (they were sick and tired of the protracted winter and bitterly disappointed to see the snow). Thus the extraverbal context is seen not as a backdrop to the utterance but 'the situation enters into the utterance as an essential constitutive part of the structure of its import' (Volosinov 1876 p100). And this notion of situation does not just involve the physical surroundings, but also the interlocuters'



shared social world. Volosinov's conception of the 'social world' includes, I would suggest, the social and cultural practices which are documented in detail by ethnographers of communication.

Volosinov and Bakhtin reject both the Saussurean construct of language as a self-contained abstract system and the 'individualistic subjectivism' of the nineteenth linguist Von Humboldt, who saw language originating in individual subjective needs and experience. Rather, for Volosinov, the process works in the opposite direction, and individual consciousness takes shape through 'the material of signs (*particularly language*) created by an organised group in the process of its organised intercourse' (Volosinov 1986 p13). These signs, including language, are always ideologically accented; because language is generated within concrete situations, often involving the intersection of conflicting interests of different social groups, he says it 'refracts' rather than 'reflects' reality, encoding particular values according to the perspective of the speaker. An utterance, then, will express a point of view, giving the words used a particular 'evaluative accent'. In addition, words display 'multi-accentuality', carrying different values depending on the context of their use.

Volosinov describes the material embeddedness of the forms and themes of verbal discourse, and the relationship between everyday local conversations or 'speech performances' and broader social structures and cultural values in a manner which clearly identifies the kind of data on which my thesis is based as a crucial mediating link between the individual and the social, and between the micro and macro-levels of social analysis. Volosinov sees everyday talk and 'speech performances' (or language events) as the actual dynamic manifestation of what he calls 'social psychology': that is, the link for Marxists between the mental creativity of individual human beings ,



and the material basis of the sociopolitical order (Mateijka and Titunik 1986 p3, Volosinov 1986 p19). His description of 'social psychology' has strongly influenced my own approach to everyday talk, within the research:

Production relations and the sociopolitical order shaped by those relations determine the full range of contacts between people, all the forms and means of their verbal communication - at work, in political life, in ideological creativity. In turn, from the conditions, forms and types of verbal communication derive not only the forms but also the themes (*ie contextualised meaning*) of speech performances.

Social psychology is first and foremost an atmosphere made up of multifarious 'speech performances' that engulf and wash over all persistent forms and kinds of ideological creativity: unofficial discussions, exchanges of opinion at the theater or concert or at various types of social gatherings, purely chance exchanges of words, one's manner of verbal reaction to happenings in one's life and daily existence, one's inner word manner of identifying oneself and identifying one's position in society and so on. Social psychology exists primarily in a wide variety of forms of the 'utterance', of little *speech genres*, of internal and external kinds, ....all.. of course joined with other types of semiotic manifestation and interchange, with miming, gesturing, acting out and the like.

All these forms of speech interchange operate in extremely close connection with the conditions of the social situation in which they occur and exhibit an extraordinary sensitivity to all fluctuations in the social atmosphere. And it is here, in the inner workings of this verbally materialised social psychology (*ie everyday speech performances*), that the barely noticeable shifts and changes that will later find expression in fully fledged ideological products accumulate.' (Volosinov 1986 p19-20).

In some ways Volosinov's seems a reductive Marxist analysis, tracing the need to communicate, the forms of language and the themes of utterances back ultimately to production relations. But I would argue that taking his account of 'social psychology' quoted above, together with the sociohistorical concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia discussed below, provides a dynamic, ideological view of both

language and social structure, which can be used to extend the theorisation of context, and of social aspects of language. What I find particularly interesting is Volosinov's focus on the instantiation of an unstable, contested social structure and ideological world within everyday verbal exchanges and individuals' 'inner word manner', or reflections.

This relationship between utterances and broader forces of power is further developed in Bakhtin's conception of the conflicting forces within language and social process, and his account of speakers' appropriation of more or less authoritative voices within everyday dialogues. I shall now discuss Bakhtin's notion of language as a site of struggle, and then look at his ideas about the taking on of voices in the next sub-section below. Bakhtin sees a struggle between opposing forces of centralisation and diversification as being played out at every level of language use and the social process. This tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces is associated with a struggle between particular kinds of ideological discourses<sup>7</sup>. The centripetal forces in linguistic terms work towards a uniform language system, and on the social level are connected with the processes of socio-political and cultural centralization. They are associated with what Bakhtin calls the authoritative discourse of religious dogma, scientific truth, and the political and moral status quo. This discourse is spoken by fathers, adults, teachers and so on, and is characteristically inflexible and fixed. These centripetal forces are however in constant tension with, and interpenetrated by, centrifugal

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<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin's use of the Russian term 'slovo', which signifies both an individual word and a method of using words that presumes a type of authority (Emerson and Holquist 1981), has been translated by them as 'discourse'. This use of 'discourse', then, loosely implies an encoding of particular perspectives on social relations and knowledge, which is rather less explicitly developed than within Foucault's 'orders of discourse'.

forces, which result in language at any given moment being stratified and diversified into socio-ideological variants in terms of different genres, professions, age-groups and historical periods. Lexicological, semantic and syntactic features of language use within particular written genres, for example oratorial, high literature, newspapers, school textbooks (which are always associated with particular aims and agendas) 'knit together with specific points of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents (*ie evaluative perspectives*) characteristic of the given genre' (Bakhtin 1981 p287).

In his later work Bakhtin extends the concept of genre more broadly to speech and vernacular writing as well as literature. It thus includes:

Short rejoinders of daily dialogue (and these are extremely varied depending on the subject matter, situation and participants), everyday narration, writing (in all its various forms), the brief standard military command, the elaborate and detailed order, the fairly variegated repertoire of business documents (for the most part standard), and the diverse world of commentary (in the broad sense of the word: social, political) ... the diverse forms of scientific statements and all literary genres (from the proverb to the multivolume novel). (Bakhtin 1986 p60-1).

In addition to its diversification into genres, particular professional concerns and traditions have 'accented' the use of language by doctors, business men, teachers and so on in different ways, according to the interests and priorities of these groups. Finally, at any given historical moment, different social groups and age groups have their own language, vocabulary and 'accentual system' (*ie how they use language to refract experience from particular evaluative perspectives*). These different social languages 'cohabit', mutually supplementing each other, contradicting one another and interrelating dialogically. Bakhtin's vision of language is therefore intrinsically heterogenous, internally conflictual, and dynamic. He explains:



'at any moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools and so forth, all given a bodily form. These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying "languages"' (Bakhtin 1981 p291).

At their most extreme, centrifugal forces are associated with what Bakhtin terms 'inwardly persuasive discourse', which is intensely interactive and contemporaneous. It accompanies direct, personal, everyday experience, and as its semantic structure is open, in each new context that dialogises it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer ways to mean, in its endless struggle with other inwardly persuasive discourses and with authoritative discourses. Bakhtin sees the conflicting forces of centralisation and diversification as operating at every level of language use, so that each language variety, each use of a particular genre and indeed each utterance, involves a dynamic tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces. It is this tension which keeps language alive, preventing it from ossifying and losing meaning potential in an over rigid authoritative discourse at one extreme, or fragmenting to the point of disintegrating meaning and communicative use, at the other.

I would suggest that Bakhtin's notion of discourse should be seen essentially as an abstraction, and authoritative and inwardly persuasive discourses as idealised types of language use. This would resolve the apparent anomaly between his claim for an all pervasive struggle between authoritative and inwardly persuasive discourse, and his characterisation of authoritative discourse as spoken by particular social figures. The interpenetration of the opposing forces



between different discourses in actual dialogue can be further explained through the concept of dialogism, to which I shall now turn.

### **Dialogism and the taking on of voices**

I shall discuss two main related uses of the term 'dialogic' in Bakhtin and Volosinov's writings which have particular relevance for my research. First, all utterances are seen as embedded in dialogic chains, because they both respond in some sense to previous utterances, and also anticipate their own responses. Second, when the voices of others are reproduced or reported within utterances, these bring with them new dialogic links with other different voices and contexts. The way in which the current speaker frames these voices creates particular kinds of dialogic relationships between the speaker's voice, and the imported voices. I shall look now at each of these aspects of dialogism, in turn.

Volosinov (1986) emphasises the interactional nature of verbal exchanges, in his discussion of how the audience is implicated in the nature of an utterance, and in his dialogic account of listening. When we use a word in a particular way, Volosinov suggests, we are orientating ourselves to what we perceive is the world view of the person we're speaking to (whether to confirm or disagree with that view). We assume certain shared knowledge which need not be made explicit, and predict and expect certain kinds of response. For every utterance or piece of writing there must always be an audience assumed by the speaker or writer, and their expectations of that audience will shape and structure the form and theme of the utterance or text. Similarly, in understanding the theme, or situated meaning, of another person's utterance, the listener orientates themselves to it, locating it in relation to their own inner

consciousness. 'For each word of the utterance that we are in the process of understanding, we, as it were, lay down a set of our own answering words....In essence, meaning belongs to a word in its position between speakers; that is, meaning is realised only in the process of active, responsive, understanding. ' (Volosinov 1986 p102-3) Thus, a meaning does not belong to the speaker, or the listener, or to the word spoken; it is only realised through an interaction. In this sense it is collaboratively, not individually produced.

Response links are not limited to the immediate conversation but may stretch across different times and different contexts. 'Any utterance- the finished written utterance not excepted- makes a response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. It is but one link in a continuous chain of speech performances' (Volosinov 1986 p72). Bakhtin links this dialogic quality of individual utterances to the social generation of individual consciousness:

Any concrete utterance is a link in the chain of speech communion of a particular sphere...Utterances are not indifferent to each other and not self sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another... Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communion....Our thought itself-philosophical, scientific and artistic- is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought, and this cannot but be reflected in the forms that verbally express our thought as well. (Bakhtin 1986 p91-92).

To turn now to what I identified as the second kind of dialogism, the 'chain of speech communion' is created not just by responsivity, but also by the invoking within utterances of other speakers' voices and therefore other contexts. Since language is always generated within particular socio-cultural contexts it is inherently value laden; the words we use have always been previously used by other speakers

with a particular purpose and world view. In this sense we always speak with the words of others:

The word in language is always half someone else's. It becomes one's own only when the speaker populates it with their own intentions, their own accent, when they appropriate the word, adapting it to their own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary, that the speaker gets their words!), but rather it exists in other peoples' mouths, in other peoples' concrete contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own..... Language is not a neutral medium which passes freely and easily into the private property of the speakers' intentions; it is populated - overpopulated, with the intentions of others (Bakhtin 1981 pp 293-294).

When one invokes a voice, one does not just invoke another speaker. The voice brings with it the generic connotations of its previous contexts of use, and also the connotations of a particular social language, (discourse associated with a class, profession, age-group, within a given social system at a particular time, as described earlier above). The genres and social languages invoked by a voice denote and express related collections of belief systems and value judgements. Because of the work of these different stratifying forces, there are no 'neutral' words and forms; 'each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word' (Bakhtin op cit p293).

The tying of words to voices and therefore to other contexts and motivations does not produce simple direct intertextual references. Bakhtin suggests that there is a struggle within the utterance to wrest a currently intended meaning from words which are 'overpopulated with the intentions of others'. These voices may be more or less



authoritative or inwardly persuasive, and it is through their invoking, and the interplay between them and the speaker's current intentions, that the struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces is instantiated at the level of individual utterances. This struggle, I would also suggest, contributes to the indeterminacy and ambiguity of meaning in the informal conversations of the children I studied, which I discuss in more detail in my analysis of the data.

Sometimes, of course, we claim to be directly reporting the words of others, but here also their meaning and function are reconstructed in particular ways depending on how we recontextualize them in a current utterance, to fulfil current conversational purposes. The way the reported speech is framed is as important an aspect of the communication as its content. As Volosinov (1986 p 115) puts it, 'Reported speech is speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time *speech about speech, utterance about utterance*'. Whether in a conversational anecdote, a work of fiction, a polemical article or a defence attorney's summation, reported speech always includes an implied element of commentary, or evaluation, as well as reporting. Words are slightly changed or edited, bits are left out, or the whole quotation is framed in a particular way in the new context. Volosinov suggests we can identify two main directions in the way speech is reported. In the first 'linear' style of reporting, the words are reproduced verbatim, and the boundaries between the reporter's voice and the reported voice are clear-cut. In the pictorial style, however, the reported speech is infiltrated with the reporter's speech, and the boundaries are unclear. He suggests the reporting mode is linked both to the nature of the voice being reported (authoritative voices tend to be reported in the linear style) and to prevailing ideological practices within a society (the linear style being associated



with authoritarianism) (Volosinov 1986 p119-123). Within the pictorial style, Volosinov identifies further mixed styles of reporting speech where the reporting and reported voices merge in more subtle variations of direct and indirect discourse. As Clark and Holquist (1984) point out, for Volosinov questions about reported speech are also questions about the politics of quotation- how is another person's meaning reshaped and recontextualised? Who has the right to report particular other people's voices, and in what contexts? What is the nature of the dynamic relationships between the reporter's and the reported speech, and between the reported speech and the reporting context? I shall be exploring the use of reported speech and other appropriations of voices in my own data in some detail, particularly in Chapter Five and in more general terms throughout this thesis.

If all utterances and their associated invoked voices respond to previous utterances and also anticipate future responses, and if the struggle between centrifugal and centripetal forces is present at every level of language, we can treat all discourse as essentially dialogic. In his earlier writings, however, Bakhtin (1984) characterises Dostoevsky's novel style as 'dialogic', in contrast to what he calls the 'monologic' style of other authors such as Tolstoy, Turgenev and Balzac. While the monologic style is author-centred, and the character's voices are dominated by the author's perspective and intentions, the dialogic style creates a polyphony of different voices and consciousnesses with apparent independent validity:

'A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses ...is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event'. (Bakhtin 1984 p6).

This dialogic style, Bakhtin claims, is a more accurate reflection of the 'multileveledness and contradictoriness of social reality' (Bakhtin op cit p27). On the basis of Bakhtin's discussion of Dostoevsky's work it would appear that real life discourses can be characterised as either dialogic or monologic, depending on how far they are dominated by an authoritative voice. However, in his later work, Bakhtin clearly claims that all kinds of discourse are essentially dialogic: even an apparently monological scientific or philosophical treatise 'cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression. It will be manifested in the overtones of the style, in the finest nuances of the composition' (Bakhtin 1986 p92). Even the most authoritative voice is responding to and anticipating other voices, and is invoking particular social criteria for authority which are ultimately questionable.

### **The dialogic constitution of individual consciousness**

Bakhtin and Volosinov's emphasis on the constitutive relationship between utterances and responses, and the population of utterances by other voices, problematises the notion of an individual/author of ideas and messages which is intrinsic to both the Saussurean model of communication, rather more profoundly than either Hymes or Goffman do. A focus on intersubjectivity (and the implications of this for the constitution of the speaking subject) is already evident in Volosinov's account (1976) of the dependence of meaning in everyday discourse on the 'extraverbal' context, which was discussed in relation to the utterance 'well', earlier above. An important part of the theme (situated meaning) of the utterance is what is left *unsaid* - there is a commonality of experience implied which anchors it within a particular context and moment of time. The unspoken part of the

utterance does not just comprise the shared physical surroundings, but also shared conditions of life which generate value judgements - an assumed intersubjective world. It is in relation to this assumed shared and therefore inarticulated social world which individual emotions are expressed. In this sense the 'I' can recognise itself verbally only on the basis of 'we' (Volosinov 1976 p100)<sup>8</sup>.

More specifically, Bakhtin and Volosinov link heteroglossia and dialogicality to the development of identity in two ways. First, Bakhtin relates it to his ideas about the taking on of voices. Since taking on a voice always involves taking on a specific value position, the speaker is therefore trying out, or appropriating, the moral stance or attitudes of another. In this sense, 'the ideological becoming of a human being ... is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others' (Bakhtin 1981 p.134). Second, within sociohistorical theory, material conditions generate particular kinds of social relationships and language forms and themes which are then internalised from dialogues to become inner speech. Thus the processes which define the content of the psyche occur not inside, but outside the individual organism, and language mediates between the individual and the material world. For Volosinov, every utterance involves a dialectical synthesis between the individual psyche, and their social ideological context.

In each speech act, subjective experience perishes in the objective fact of the enunciated word-utterance, and the enunciated word is subjectified in the act of responsive understanding in order to generate, sooner or later, a counter statement. Each word, as we know it, is a little arena for the clash and criss-crossing of differently orientated social accents. A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is a product of the living interaction of social forces.' (Volosinov 1986 p41)

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<sup>8</sup> cf Mead's argument (1934) that the distinction between inside and outside, between self and other, only arises out of the social life process.



It is this ideologically laden dialogue which is internalised as inner speech. Since every spoken word is social, and communicates some kind of ideological evaluation, the same holds true for inner speech, or thought, and one's sense of self. 'The very degree of consciousness of one's individuality and its inner rights and privileges is ideological, historical, and wholly conditioned by sociological factors' (Volosinov *op cit* p34).

Volosinov claims that the structure as well as the theme of our thoughts reflects their social origin. Connections between thoughts are not organised on the basis of grammar, but on the basis of dialogue, as one thought calls forth an answering thought, and so on. Thus Bakhtin suggests that 'to think about (someone) is to talk with them' (Bakhtin 1984 p68). Individual consciousness is in this sense an accumulation of dialogic experiences, each one interpreted and responded to in the light of previous dialogues, and simultaneously shifting and repatterning the accumulation of that previous experience. Since utterances and texts in the outer social world are a site of struggle, and are populated with the voices of others, then one must assume that an inner consciousness constituted from internalised dialogues is itself inherently multi-voiced, dialogic and fragmented.

Volosinov (1986 p34) argues that 'a rigorous distinction should always be made between the concept of the individual as natural specimen without reference to the social world (ie the individual as object of the biologist's knowledge and study) and the concept of individuality which has the status of an ideological semiotic superstructure over the natural individual and which therefore is a social concept'. In spite of its biological base, therefore, he is arguing, the individual psyche is always thoroughly social, since we only ever experience ourselves, and the rest of the world around, through the mediation of social



signs, particularly language. The relationship between the biological and the cultural, and between the individual and the social, is developed further in Vygotsky's work, to which I shall now turn. I shall be relying closely on Vygotskian theory in my account of the learning processes in children's informal talk.

### **Language, thought and learning**

Vygotsky, like Bakhtin and Volosinov, takes the Marxist position that the individual is a product of their social and material circumstances. For him, also, the direction of development in thought and language is always from the social to the individual, and he applies these ideas within his influential theory of young children's development and learning.

In Vygotsky's view language performs a crucial role in mediating between the cognitive development of the individual, on the one hand, and their cultural and historical environment on the other. He sees thought and language as having different mental origins, but coming together in around the third year to provide a powerful tool for learning. At this point development becomes culturally shaped. The lower mental biological processes of the young baby are transformed by the development of speech into higher sociocultural processes. This is because language is first experienced in the context of social relationships in particular cultural contexts. For Vygotsky, 'a sign is always a means used originally for social purposes, a means of influencing others, and only later becomes a means of influencing oneself.' (Vygotsky 1981 p.157, quoted in Wertsch 1991). The child re-enacts these dialogues in egocentric and inner speech (or thought), and at a later stage they are used to plan future activity as well as to solve immediate problems. As the dialogues are internalised to feed

into internal conceptual development they bring with them the cultural trappings of meanings and relationships from the dialogues and situations in which they were encountered. Thus organic and cultural development interpenetrate each other, and particular language practices help to shape the content, and form, of knowledge. Vygotsky explains how, at this stage of development, language takes on an intrapersonal as well as an interpersonal function, and sociohistorical and biological processes are brought together:

When children develop a method of behaviour for guiding themselves that had previously been used in relation to another person, when they organize their own activities according to a social form of behaviour, they succeed in applying a social attitude to themselves. The history of the process of the internalisation of social speech is also the history of the socialization of children's practical intellect.' (Vygotsky 1978 p. 27).

Vygotsky sees dialogue as a site for all kinds of learning and development.

Any function in the child's cultural (ie higher) development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an inter-psychological category, and then within the child as an intra-psychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts and the development of volition. We may consider this position as a law in the full sense of the word, but it goes without saying that internalisation transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. Social relations or relations among people underlie all higher functions and their relationships'. (Vygotsky 1981 p 163).

Everyday talk can therefore be seen as an active force in both the cognitive development and the acculturation of the child. A further transformation occurs at adolescence when learning to direct one's own mental processes with the aid of words or signs become an integral part of concept development. This conceptual development is

prompted from the outside, from the socio-cultural milieu, and concept formation is therefore 'a function of the adolescent's total social and cultural growth' (Vygotsky op cit p108).

Seeing the origin of intramental functioning in intermental activity has a number of interesting implications. One is Vygotsky's idea of a 'zone of proximal development', which is the difference between what a child can achieve on his or her own, and what the same child can achieve when supported through dialogue. So children's talk may show evidence of what he calls the 'buds or flowers of development rather than the fruits' (Vygotsky op cit p86) and provide direct evidence of learning processes before these are internalised as part of individual intellectual development. Typically a zone of proximal development is created in dialogue with an adult or more able peer, but Vygotsky also sees dialogues with other children at a similar intellectual level as providing a supportive learning environment. He stresses that the zone of proximal development is 'able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers' (Vygotsky 1978 p90, see also Forman and Cazden 1985). Wertsch (1991) points out that Vygotsky's theory of social cognition implies that mental activities like memory and problem solving can become essentially joint, rather than individual activities. I shall be exploring this idea in relation to my data in Chapter Six. It also has particularly interesting implications in relation to literacy development, suggesting that any collaborative understandings and interpretations of texts which are being negotiated in children's talk may be ahead of and leading their individual comprehension. In this way talk may provide primary data about the actual process of meaning-making we call reading (see Chapter Eight).



Although Vygotsky limited his attention to localized examples of intermental activity, for example his notion of the zone of proximal development, logically one could trace forces out from these local contexts to the kind of social practices and cultural values documented by the ethnographers of communication, and the broader historical and economic forces whose relationship to language is discussed by Volosinov. Vygotsky's ideas provide a strong focus on the social and cultural situatedness of language in relation to children's learning. They also provide a central justification for focusing on children's informal talk within this thesis; if we take the origin of intramental functioning to be culturally and historically situated intermental functioning, and if an important mediational activity is language, then children's dialogues should provide a rich site for looking at the ways in which they are constructing meanings and knowledge, and it should also, from an anthropological point of view, reveal insights into the kinds of meanings and knowledge which are being privileged in that particular cultural and historical context.

Vygotsky and Volosinov share beliefs about the social origins of language and thought. Whereas Volosinov concentrates on the semiotic potential of internalised dialogues, Vygotsky pushes further to locate the pivotal point between the individual and the social both in relation to development, and to the production of specific words and utterances. Thus he describes the bringing of the outer social world inwards through language to thought, and of individual thoughts outwards into the social world through language as a dialectical interlocking process. The development of an utterance from a motive through thoughts and meanings into words is interpenetrated by the social processes shaping words, meanings, thoughts, needs and desires, which brings the outside to the inside.



The word expresses individual feeling but is always socially shaped. In this way language is placed at the centre of the historical dialectical process between the individual and the social (Vygotsky 1986).

Vygotsky provides the psychological basis for the primacy of the social dimension of consciousness which underlies Volosinov's semiotic theory of language. This has quite radical implications for the conception of the individual. Hasan (1992 p496) quotes Vygotsky's colleague Luria as suggesting that 'the Cartesian notion of the primacy of self-consciousness', which assigns a secondary rank to 'the other' has to be rejected since the growth of specifically human mental acts already presupposes an 'other'.

## 2.4 Conclusion

I have discussed how the traditional theoretical paradigms in linguistics and psychology, with their emphasis on universal laws and individual competence, fail to address the collaborative nature of communication, or the ways in which social, cultural and historical aspects of context influence the structure, function and meaning of specific language interactions. In more recent years there has been a move across the social sciences to shift the focus of language away from abstract systems and laws to situated, real life speech. At the same time, anthropological studies emphasising the embeddedness of language in social practice, and studies from conversation analysis and discursive psychology showing the dynamic and interactional nature of communicative understanding, have developed a view of talk and literacy as social, cultural accomplishments. The focus of interest is shifting away from constructs like individuals and texts to the dynamic relationships between them, and constructs are being

reconceptualised as parts of processes rather than as fixed entities. In this processual view of language and social action, the 'self' becomes more distributed, defining and redefining itself across different contexts and relationships.

I have suggested that within this new orientation towards the study of language, key questions have emerged which are also central to my own research. These questions concern how to conceptualise the relationship between text and context, how to analyse intertextuality/intercontextuality, and how to address and describe the social and historical dimensions of language interactions, and the relationship between the micro-level of individual language acts, and broader patterns of social structure and cultural values. In relation to these questions, I have argued that Bakhtin and Volosinov, particularly in their writings on heteroglossia, dialogically and reported speech, provide a culturally and historically situated dialogic framework which enables one to contemplate diversity without reducing its meanings either to individual needs on the one hand, or to institutional imperatives on the other. This framework can both illuminate and extend the detailed insights gained about specific contexts and practices from the ethnography of communication. Furthermore, putting Bakhtin's and Volosinov's ideas about voice and dialogism together with Vygotsky's ideas about language as mediating between socio-cultural experience and individual cognitive development, provides a powerful framework for looking at children's talk as involving the situated, dynamic construction of culturally appropriate meanings, knowledge and identity, in both authoritative and inwardly persuasive terms.

## Chapter Three: Research methods

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I shall explain the relationship between my theoretical framework and research methods, and describe my collection and analysis of data. In brief, my fieldwork involved using a radio microphone and personal cassette recorder to collect continuous tape-recordings of 10-12 year olds' talk from across the school day in two white working-class middle schools, over a three day pilot and then a three week main study period. This data was supplemented by ethnographic observation notes and photographs, the collection of texts used or produced by the children, and 40-60 minute taped informal interviews about their activities and interests with the thirty four children in the main study, in friendship pairs. I shall begin in this Introduction by explaining my focus on children's informal talk as a way of understanding how they construct knowledge and identities, in relation to the key theoretical ideas which I discussed in the Chapter Two. The nature of my theoretical focus necessitated the adoption of an ethnographic approach. In Section 3.2 I shall go on to discuss methodological issues within ethnography which are particularly relevant to my work, in relation to researching language use, doing ethnography 'at home' and fieldwork with children. In Sections 3.3 and 3.4, I shall discuss the collection and analysis of the data.

I have described in Chapter Two how Vygotsky's socio-cognitive theory suggests that children's talk is a rich site for looking both at how they collaboratively construct knowledge, and also at the



contents of that knowledge. Evidence from anthropology, and particularly from ethnographies of communication, however, shows that in order to understand the function and meaning of naturally occurring language use, we need to recognise its complex relationships with various aspects of the social and cultural context. This insight has both theoretical and methodological implications for my research. In theoretical terms, (and supporting Vygotsky's position), because language is an integral part of social practice, it provides evidence both at the ideational and the interpersonal level (Halliday 1985) of practices and beliefs in every area of social life. In methodological terms, exploring the relationships between language use and context involves the study and understanding of contextual features, including the nature of the social practices in the course of which the language is being used (Finnegan 1992). Thus, there is a dialectical relationship between studying language text, and studying context.

Bakhtin, Volosinov and Foucault emphasise the ideological nature of both language use and knowledge, and the implications of these for identity. In Chapter Two I referred to the ways in which language use is seen not only as an expression of identity, but also as part of its ongoing construction and negotiation; again, knowledge of social practices and of participants' own goals and values is needed to understand this process. In order to collect data on children's language which addresses the dialogic and contextual constitution of its meaning in relation to the construction of knowledge and identities, I needed to use research methods which could capture the dynamic aspects and social nuances of language in use, and document the social and cultural connotations of language practices for the participants themselves, in particular contexts. I have therefore drawn mainly on ethnographic methods. In analysing the data, I drew additionally on



the ideas of Bakhtin/Volosinov and Foucault, to further explore issues of intertextuality, identity and power.

### **3.2 Ethnographic issues**

#### **The ethnographic principles underlying my approach**

In Malinowski's classic description of the ethnographic project in anthropology, he sets out three important areas of fieldwork: the recording of tribal organisation and culture, the observation and recording of actual daily behaviour, and the collection of statements, narratives, utterances, folklore and magical formulae as 'documents of native mentality' (Malinowski 1922 p24). The goal is 'to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world' (p25), and through this to obtain new insights into the ethnographer's own society, and indeed into the nature of all human existence. This emphasis on using direct observation and documentation, together with the collection of insider oral and written texts, to record a particular group's culture and organisation in order that it may be compared with that of others, has remained central to ethnography. However, as the interest of ethnographers has shifted from the traditional 'primitive' locations to sites within the developed world, methodological interest has moved away from how to penetrate the exotic to focus more on what is unique about the ethnographic approach, as opposed to other kinds of social enquiry, whatever the context being researched. Thus Hammersley (1990) defines ethnography as social research which gathers empirical data from real world natural contexts using a range of unstructured methods, particularly observation and informal conversation. The focus is usually a small scale setting or group, and data analysis

involves the interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions. Zaharlick and Green (1991) and Green and Bloome (1995) describe ethnography as a theoretically driven, systematic, holistic approach to the study of everyday life of a social group involving an interactive- reactive approach and a comparative perspective. Because researchers are endeavouring to discover emic (insider) meanings and understandings, they try not to import preconceived notions of what counts as, for example, knowledge or learning, into the field, but allow these to emerge from the data. However, Green and Bloome suggest, interpretations will inevitably be theoretically shaped in terms of the particular discipline within which ethnographers are working. Thus in my own work my background in social anthropology and education, and my interest in the Russian sociohistorical literature, has not just influenced my choice of methods, and the kind of data I collected, but also set me off in particular directions of development in analysis and interpretation. Whether this theoretical framing proves restrictive or productive, I would suggest, depends on the nature of the 'interactive-reactive' process cited by Zaharlick and Green between theoretical ideas, empirical findings, and analysis and writing, as the research progresses, new questions arise and are investigated, and grounded theory is developed (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In my case, I found that the recursive pattern of writing up data, returning to theoretical writings and then reviewing the data and the theory in the light of more detailed understanding, was particularly productive in the areas of the relationship of language to context, the collaborative construction of meaning, and the children's use of other voices. For instance, I could not have developed my ideas about children's use of reported speech in oral narratives without repeatedly returning to Bakhtin (1986) and Volosinov (1973) while I was analysing the data.

Although 'doing ethnography' in the fullest sense involves the 'framing, conceptualising, conducting, interpreting, writing and reporting associated with a broad, in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group' (Green and Bloome 1995), it is also possible to adopt a less comprehensive 'ethnographic perspective', to study particular aspects of everyday life and cultural practices. The 'ethnographic perspective' is still for Green and Bloome strongly theoretically driven, in contrast to the final kind of ethnographic approach they identify, 'using ethnographic tools' (for example observation, interview), which they suggest may or may not be guided by cultural theories. My own work is situated within the second approach identified by Green and Bloome: the 'ethnographic perspective'. I did not have the time or resources to carry out a comprehensive study of the 10-12 year olds' daily lives; even recording their language practices outside school was impractical in terms of use of technical equipment and ethical issues concerning other people with whom they might come into contact. I believed, however, that a detailed documenting of children's language practices across the quite considerable range of social contexts within school over a number of weeks would provide me with sufficient data to look in some detail at how they were constructing what counted for them as important knowledge, and negotiating aspects of identity.

My collection and analysis of data was strongly directed by the ethnography of communication principles outlined by Shuy (1984; quoted in Bauman and Sherzer 1992 p xvi)<sup>9</sup>. These principles include a reliance on the direct observation of everyday, dynamic language events and performance data, rather than on reported or interpreted

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<sup>9</sup> See also ethnography of communication sources discussed in Chapter Two, eg Hymes (1972), Heath (1983), Shuman (1986)



representations, the use of units of analysis suggested by the data rather than prearranged categories, exploring the different perspectives of participants, viewing both referential and inferential meaning as constructed by participants through interaction, and the use of appropriate technology (for example tape recording) to capture the event being studied, for multiple examinations. In accordance with the view that the meaning of a written text is shaped by the social processes within which it is produced, circulated and interpreted (see Chapter Two), the texts produced or read by children which I collected were analysed as part of the social interaction and language event within which they were situated. Thus they are not treated as 'objective' or 'fixed' data (Ellen 1984 p73-5), but analysed in terms of their function and meaning within the ongoing negotiation of knowledge and identity through talk and other social activity. In addition to treating written texts as embedded within social processes, I have also employed a more formal textual analysis in relation to children's use of oral narrative, since I would argue that this can reveal in finer detail the intertextual mechanisms children are using to construct meaning and identity.

Although a considerable amount of my data is from directly observed and recorded language and activity, there were times during the school day when I was not present with the children whose talk was being recorded, for example in the cloakroom and playground (I was able to leave the receiver at the back of the children's classroom, and it picked up radio recordings from anywhere within the school grounds). My absence was necessary because I wanted to obtain recordings of children talking naturally without adults present; using the radio microphone at a distance, I could to some extent resolve the observer's paradox, described by Labov as 'the problem of observing



how people speak when they are not being observed' (1972 p256). Recording talk at a distance was thus not a misguided search for objective data uncontaminated by researcher involvement (Cameron et al 1992), but an effort to get inside the diversity of children's language experience, from different contexts across the school day.

In addition to collecting data from language events which I could not directly observe, I also collected a certain amount of self-report data from the interviews with friendship pairs (these interviews are discussed in more detail below). Some of this data relates to the language events in the continuous recordings from across the school day, thus providing an element of triangulation as children gave me their various explanations of what had been happening. Most of the interview data, however, relates to children's outside school experiences and interests, including their uses of literacy. These accounts provided me both with directly observed language events (for example their use of narrative in relating experience), and with indirect information concerning their informal literacy practices, which is drawn on in Chapter Eight below, and summarised in Appendix 2.

Contemporary accounts of ethnography maintain the traditional comparative element between social practices in different cultural locations. Culture is often conceptualised as a pattern of practices, beliefs and values which can be discovered and documented by the ethnographer. Spradley (1979), in his classic account of the ethnographic interview, describes culture as 'the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate behaviour' (p5), and Green and Bloome similarly define it as 'the norms that are constructed for ways of perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting within a social group' (1995 p15). My own theoretical use of Vygotsky

and Bakhtin/Volosinov would suggest a more dynamic and processual definition of culture, as ways of perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting which are negotiated and contested within the course of social interaction. As Marcus and Fisher point out, 'to bring out the critical potential embedded in the ethnographic method requires that anthropologists take seriously the notion of modern reality as a juxtaposing of alternative cultural viewpoints, which exist not merely simultaneously, but in interaction, and not as static fragments, but each as dynamic human constructions' (Marcus and Fisher 1986, p125; see also Street 1993b). This is particularly true for the age group which I am studying. As they move from childhood into adolescence they do not simply take on a coherent body of values and beliefs from the older generation, but struggle to understand the inconsistent and conflicting experiences, accounts and evaluations around them, comparing their experiences and reflections with others, appropriating and contesting perspectives and judgements, and trying out new aspects of identity in the context of various different social interactions among themselves and with adults. I would suggest that this period of children's lives is particularly significant, not just in revealing the social processes involved in moving from childhood into adolescence, but in highlighting through the issues which emerge as important in children's talk, cultural themes which are of particular interest within the larger social context. Particular themes emerged as significant in the continuous recordings of children's talk over the school day, and I pursued these more explicitly, in the interviews. These (overlapping) themes include the nature of parent-child relationships, what friendship involves, how to relate to other people in general, reactions to different kinds of authority, and aspects of gendered identity. The notion of cultural themes has been used in



anthropology to identify important underlying cognitive principles which organise meaning across a number of different domains (Spradley 1979 p186). I would suggest these themes are dialogically and dynamically constructed. In my own analysis themes significant for the children emerge as topics or issues to which they return again and again in different conversations and contexts, so that in addition to the immediate level of specific conversations, there is another, meta-level long conversation going on across days and weeks about these more overarching issues.

Although my research focusses on one part of children's lives, the time they spend in school, it is holistic in the sense that I am looking across all their language experience over this period, in order to identify recurring patterns across different language events and contexts, rather than focusing in on one area, say, group work on curriculum tasks. Studies of children's talk in school have tended to be methodologically framed by pedagogical criteria, and educationally institutionalised notions of competence (for example Barnes and Todd 1977, Phillips 1985, Dyson 1987, Edwards and Mercer 1987, Cazden 1988, Swann and Graddol 1988, Bennett and Dunne 1990, Fisher 1993, Edwards and Westgate 1994). And where anthropological researchers have looked at the language practices that children bring into school from different community backgrounds, these are then compared with those needed in the school for educational purposes (for example Phillips 1972, Michaels 1981, and Heath 1983, discussed in Chapter Two). By contrast, I was most interested in trying to understand children's language use from the perspective of their own beliefs, values and priorities, rather than from the point of view of pedagogical or educational criteria. I therefore needed to move away

from the kinds of implicit norms and assumptions underlying the majority of research on children's language in school.

The comparative element in American anthropological research is echoed in American and British sociological studies of children in the classroom. Much British ethnographic research in this area, often framed theoretically in Marxist terms, contrasts the middle class values of the teachers and the school with the working class background of many of the pupils (for example Sharp and Green 1975, Willis 1977, Woods 1984). Change for these researchers often involved pupil resistance, and their transformation, through various more or less subtle means, from recalcitrant adolescents into compliant workers (for example Willis 1977, and the US studies Everart 1983 and McLaren 1986). At a more micro-level, research into pupils' practices and understandings is often couched in terms of their subgroup membership, and various different subgroups are compared and contrasted, for example Pollard's goodies, jokers and gangs (1984) and Woods' conformists, colonisers or rebels (1978). While these comparisons and groupings are obviously productive in terms of the theoretical positions and aims of these researchers, I was more interested in the patterns that would emerge from my data in relation to children's construction of knowledge and identity across a range of contexts, and the nature of intertextual links within their language use, rather than in delineating and then contrasting different groups based on class, race, orientation to school authority and so on. In addition, it has been suggested that there are problems with the use of subcultures as an explanatory concept, particularly in relation to studying girls. Hey (1989) argues that the theoretical and empirical preoccupation of subcultural models with producing accounts of visible resistant cultural strategies and their prioritisation of class



leads to an omission of the interpersonal realm which plays such a large part in the social construction of girls. She also points out that the focus on one subculture, often accompanied by the subcultural writer's own insertion into the debate, prevents them from asking serious questions about the despised 'other'- the 'ear'oles' or the girls in Willis study, for example, or the girls in Everhart's monograph. (Certainly I find Everhart's reporting of the sexist abuse directed by the male adolescents he was studying against their female classmates uncomfortably monologic; my own data suggests that both boys and girls have a much more complex and reflective approach to constructing adolescent gender relations across different contexts).

In Britain there have been a small number of sociolinguistic studies of the language practices of adolescents outside school. Hewitt (1986) is most interested in how language use among black and white adolescents in South London expresses, influences and plays out cultural relations. He collected his data through observation, interviews and recordings of natural speech in youth clubs and on the street. He focusses on the use of Caribbean-based Creole speech by white adolescents, in conjunction with their adoption of other expressive 'black' forms in music and dress, and the role of these practices in negotiating friendship and group allegiance, and in renegotiating the wider structures of racial stratification. Hewitt (1991) suggests that there are inner and outer aspects to the relationship between language use and identity, which he compares respectively to Heidegger's 'home of being' and Wittenstein's 'way of life' (op cit p37). He suggests that a challenge within the ethnography of communication is to address the interplay between these two aspects of the language/identity relationship, for example to grasp the issues of language and self which are at work behind the kind of

cultural expression he describes in his 1986 study. Although in my study I am not documenting the same order of adolescent identification practices as Hewitt, I am looking at the intricate relationships between slightly younger children's naturally occurring language practices and their negotiations of a sense of inner self. Thus, I am aiming to produce what Hewitt calls 'a social hermeneutic of living speech' (op cit 1991 p40). Rampton (1995) carried out a similar study to Hewitt's, in the South Midlands of England where he focused on the use of Panjabi by young people of Anglo and Afro-Caribbean descent, the use of Creole by Anglos and Panjabis, and the use of stylised Indian English by all three groups. He analyses these instances of 'language crossing' in relation to the 'shifting and contested relationship between race and class' (op cit p14).

My methods of data collection, like those of Hewitt and Rampton, include observation, interviewing and the recording of natural speech. But my research questions are less focused on the implications of specific sociolinguistic features; I am more concerned with documenting the links between patterns of use, interactional relationships and ways of orientating to texts and knowledge, within 10-12 year olds' language experience in general. As I explained in the Introduction to the thesis, my collection of rather longer continuous recordings of children's talk across a variety of contexts throughout the school day has enabled me to identify recurring patterns of language use and their recontextualisation within different settings, and to pursue the analysis of various kinds of intertextual connections.

I should perhaps briefly mention here the unique collection in Britain by the Opies, of children's playground songs, games and other oral traditions (Opie, I. and Opie, P. 1959 and 1985). Gathered through



years of observation and notes, these provide an important resource for checking the history and significance of particular rhymes, which I used during my research. Although my own interest was more in the function and meaning of rhymes as used in specific contexts, the Opies show that these rhymes have their own resonance and intertextual connotations, within the oral tradition which is passed down from one generation of children to the next (and which was still very much alive, particularly among the younger children in my study).

### **Ethnographic research 'at home'**

Although the use of ethnographic methods in contexts relatively local and familiar to the researcher is now generally accepted, there is still a sense in the anthropological literature that such locations need special justification. Finnegan (1992) points out that much of the anthropological literature on methods, for example Ellen (1984), stresses 'the value of a detached, comparative outsider's eye, while pointing out the limitations of not possessing the insider's familiarity with local perceptions, experience and language' (Finnegan 1992 p54). Finnegan suggests that the methodological literature has not caught up with the shift in anthropology to research 'at home', which brings its own dilemmas in relation to the relative advantages and disadvantages of various aspects of insider/outsider status. For instance there is an obvious advantage, vital in my own case, of familiarity with language, and with the subtle nuances of particular social practices and participant perceptions. But there is the concomitant danger of the ethnographer not being able to distance themselves sufficiently, or to set aside intuitive preconceptions about social activities which seem familiar. Ethnographers in semi-familiar sites may also be tempted to focus in on what seems strange, and fail to appreciate that the apparently familiar and comprehensible may



have rather different meanings and significance for the participants involved. This is a danger which is not acknowledged, I would suggest, in Spradley's advice to ethnographers to focus on the unfamiliar terms used by informants in order to identify the significant cultural symbols which together make up 'the system of symbols that constitute a culture' (Spradley 1979 p97). The children I studied did use some terms which were unfamiliar to me, for example to be 'grounded', or to 'get done' by someone, but they also used many terms which were familiar to me but, I discovered, had rather different meanings and significance for them. This particularly applied to notions around friendship, family relationships and boyfriends and girlfriends. For instance, 'going off' might refer in physical terms to a child walking away from her friend in the playground. In emotional terms, however, in the context of friendship, this phrase carried strong connotations of betrayal and abandonment not immediately obvious to adults who may have forgotten the vital importance of social connection, and the stigma of isolation, in school (Davies 1984). My data includes a list of regulations produced by two girls for their private club, which includes the rule: 'No going off' (see Appendix 3). Terms also often had different meanings for different children, either because of their varying levels of maturity, or differing family practices. For instance, referring to children as boyfriends or girlfriends, or as 'going out' with each other, did not necessarily mean there was any sexual activity or physical contact, or indeed any social activity at all outside school. For some children, however, 'going out' with someone could involve visiting each other's houses, hanging around out of school, and kissing and so on. I could not therefore assume that one child's use of the term would be the same as either my own, or another child's. Those terms which were initially

unfamiliar to me also had different connotations for different children. For instance, 'grounding' always involved some kind of restriction on children's movements as a punishment for bad behaviour, but the behaviour seen as justifying it, its extent (for example restriction to bedroom or restriction to home and garden), the frequency with which it was used and the various other withdrawals of privileges that might also be involved (for example no television, no sweets) varied widely across different households. The children themselves were surprised in the interviews when they heard each other's accounts of contrasting home practices in this area. Similarly, 'being done' either by another child or an adult had different (and contested) meanings among children. Rather than use particular children's terms as keys to the uncovering of a coherent cultural pattern, therefore, I have tried to follow the meanings which emerge for children themselves in different contexts through their ongoing conversations and social interactions. Because these conversations are themselves the site of children's ongoing construction of knowledge, meanings, as I shall discuss in some detail later in the thesis, are often ambiguous, provisional and contested.

Because my research site was a school in my own locality, it was familiar in a number of ways. I knew the catchment area, and recognised or could locate the places referred to by children; the shops, swimming pools and parks they went to, the pieces of wasteground by the canal and railway where the boys made camps. This local knowledge helped me to establish a rapport with children, especially in the interviews. As an educationalist and parent I was familiar with schools and classrooms, and I already had experience in classroom research focusing on the relationship between teacher/pupil dialogue and the construction of knowledge (Edwards



and Mercer 1987). I was used to visiting classrooms as an observer, and to the kind of things that go on in school, from the perspective of an educationalist. On the other hand, the children I researched were growing up in a working-class urban overspill council housing estate in Southeast England, a very different environment from the mixed class rural Irish community where I lived at the age of eleven, some thirty years ago. I found that the main challenge in gathering ethnographic data was not so much a problem of familiarity, but of setting aside my own disciplining as an educationalist, and in gaining the children's trust. I found that repeated listening to the tapes, which recorded a quite different situated perspective on classroom activity from my own, helped me to move away from my initial adult educationalist 'gaze'. I gradually shifted from perceptions coloured by assumptions about how talk should contribute to school curriculum goals and purposes, towards the children's own perspectives and priorities. My insights into these deepened during the interviews, which were carried out a few months after the initial three week recording period during which I had been able to get to know the children and gain their trust.

Researching local sites raises particular issues concerning the role of the researcher in the field, who is not an exotic stranger, and therefore may be expected to fit more readily into local patterns of behaviour and purposes. Children in the school where I carried out the main study were used to frequent visitors in the classroom; welfare assistants, a special needs teacher and a social services worker with young offenders regularly spent time there. Children tended to be open and friendly towards visitors; they usually seized the opportunity to ask for help with their work from any spare adult in the vicinity. As I shall explain in more detail below, my role in



relation to the children had its own trajectory, but it was to remain inherently ambiguous, since I did not fit in with any of the existing roles in the school, and in some ways seemed to transgress some conventional boundaries between adults and children, and between teachers and pupils.

### **Ethnographic research with children**

If doing research 'at home' raises particular methodological issues within anthropology, doing research with children also raises specific questions, especially in relation to the management of closeness and distance, and ethics. Taping people's private conversations always involves sensitive ethical issues, especially in the case of children because of the asymmetrical relationship of power between the researcher and the researched. Fishman (1978), who studied private conversations between adult couples within their homes, asked them to listen to the tapes she had collected and indicate any material which they did not want her to use (in fact, surprisingly little needed to be erased), and Wells (1985) offered a similar option to the families within whose homes he used radio microphones to collect timed samples of parent-child dialogue. Such procedures are not always followed with children themselves, who are often willing and vulnerable research subjects, particularly in the school context, where they are in a sense held captive, and are usually delighted to receive extra adult attention and a change from the normal routine. In both my pilot and main study school I sought permission from the head teacher, and individual teachers, to make the recordings. In the main study school, Lakeside, the head teacher informed parents by letter about the research, and gave them the opportunity to ask for their child not to be recorded (none refused). The children themselves were keen to be involved; wearing the radio microphone or using the

personal recorder were seen as conveying special kudos, and later they were all very happy to be interviewed. I made it clear to the children that I would not play the tapes to anyone else without their permission, or pass on to teachers or parents personal information they revealed in the recordings, unless I believed a child was in grave danger (I did not pass on any information).

It would have been impractical to ask children to listen to the six hours of recordings which I collected each day, but I often, at their request, played parts of the tapes in which they figured back to them at break time and I tried to answer their questions about my research as fully and clearly as possible. Since the nature of my research did not necessitate any kind of 'deep cover' (Fine and Sandstrom 1988), there was no reason not to be as open as possible about it to anyone who asked. I told the children I wanted to study their talk because it showed some of the ways they thought about, and tried to understand, things happening around them. I explained that I was interested in the different ways they learnt through talk. I did become anxious that if parents knew about the rather sensitive family material some children were revealing in the interviews, they might raise objections and thus jeopardise the research. In fact one boy's mother did complain, and I promised to destroy the tape of his interview. The fact that this boy had not been at the school during the initial recording period, and his family had not therefore received a letter explaining about the research, underlines the importance of informing and seeking permission from parents in advance, for this kind of work.

As Fine and Sandstrom (op cit) point out, participant observation with preadolescents involves some kind of recognition of 'normal' relationships between adults and children, based on differences in



age, cognitive development, physical maturity and social responsibility. There is, however, a strong tradition of ethnographic researchers attempting to enter and become one of the group of adolescents or preadolescents whom they are studying. Researchers of male youth subcultures in the 1970s and 80s tended to strive for acceptance as 'one of the lads' (Patrick 1973, Parker 1974), and more recent research by women as well as men among adolescents in school similarly stresses the researcher's efforts to acquire insider status. Shuman (1986), whose study of informal literacy practices and storytelling in a mixed race American Junior High School I discussed earlier in Chapter Two, explains how she wore jeans, sneakers and a ponytail to 'fit in', and how her Puerto Rican appearance and her ability to speak Spanish helped the students to accept and confide in her. Similarly, Hey (1989) sees herself as closer to the students than the staff in the London secondary school where she was studying the fifteen year old girls' friendships, and she hung around with girls in cloakrooms and coffee bars to collect her data. Even with younger children, Eder and Enke (1991), researching the structure of gossip among 10-14 year olds, stress that 'every effort was made to enter (children's informal groups) through peer contact rather than through adult authority figures' (p496), and describe how they established rapport through showing that they were not going to report instances of swearing. Fine and Strandstrom (op cit) also stress the importance of not responding to behaviour which would normally be reprimanded by adults, in order to establish trust with this age group. I would suggest that this suspending of aspects of adult authority in order to gain children's trust involves particularly delicate negotiation, given the importance of also acknowledging 'normal' adult child relationships which Fine and Strandstrom themselves mention earlier.



Chang (1992), who was in an interesting position as a Korean researching in an American school and writing ethnography for an American audience, looked young enough to be a foreign exchange student, and records her thrill of participating in note-passing in class, and her close personal relationship with her main informant, Marilyn. But Chang, like myself, experienced ambiguity, and sometimes had to make difficult choices between personal alignment with teachers and with students. Apart from the fact that I could by no stretch of the imagination have passed for a teenager, let alone a 10-12 year old, I felt very cautious about becoming too closely involved with the pupils at Lakeside, or of seeming in any way to collude with them against adults. While I spent almost all of my time in school with children, and a certain amount of intimacy was needed in order to collect the data, I had to remain on good terms with the teacher in a context where I was collecting data that was personally sensitive for both her and her pupils. In addition, I needed the school's backing in relation to communication with children's parents. I was aware that either the head or the class teacher, Mrs K., could have terminated my work at any time, and I felt morally and practically obliged to broadly support Mrs. K's role in the classroom. As it was, she seemed to appreciate having an extra pair of hands, and we remained on cordial, if slightly distant, terms throughout my stay.

My position within both the pilot and the main study school as a friendly outsider who did not fit the more familiar roles of teacher, work experience student or pupil helped to keep my interactions with the children relaxed and informal, and also meant that they were more explicit with me in the interview accounts and explanations than they would have been with someone who was more familiar with their circumstances. In both schools the children seemed to trust my

promise of confidentiality, and for much of the time appeared to have forgotten or become bored with the fact they were being taped. The fact that my work in school was a temporary stage of a larger process, a means to a end, was an important factor in our relationships, and in their perceptions of my longer term reasons for being there, beyond the ostensible aims of the research. For instance, in Lakeside, my main study school, Karlie asked why I was doing the research, and, after my attempt at explaining the purposes of my recordings to her, interjected 'But Janet, what do you actually want to be?'

In general, while appearing friendly and open, I let the children set their own pace for establishing any kind of closeness. I felt that my insistence to the teacher that pupils should address me by my first name (to emphasise my non-teacher status) helped to quickly establish an informal relationship, and most children seemed delighted to have extra help and attention, and contact with an interested adult. Sometimes I was aware of attempts by pupils or teachers to position me in relation to the teacher/pupil divide - as when a small group of pupils were chewing gum in the 'quiet area' screened off from the main classroom in Lakeside and Nicole said 'Janet won't split on us, will you Janet?' which was part invitation to collusion and part threat (I signalled what I hoped would convey silence on this occasion but possibly not on any future similar ones). As time progressed in the main study, I became closer to the children, and my departure after the three week recording period was marked by handmade good-bye cards (see Appendix 9) and promises to keep in touch. When I returned the following term to carry out the interviews, I was greeted enthusiastically, and the interviews themselves constituted the high point of sustained rapport and trust between myself and the children. Towards the end of my fieldwork in



Lakeside, however, an incident brought home to me the transitory and fragile nature of our connection. While I was in school to complete the last of the interviews, Mrs. K. enlisted my support against Karlie in a public diatribe in the classroom about her uncooperativeness, bad attitude and so on in a way which would have made any support of Karlie seem like a direct undermining of teacher authority. Although I did not actually speak, Karlie's sullen look in my direction made me realise that even after our fairly intimate conversations together, my role in relation to her and to the other children was at best ambiguous, and only precariously that of trusted adult. In fact our closeness was largely dependent on those very institutional structures which shaped the power relationships between adults and children in Lakeside- I could only be the kind sympathetic listener because all the management and control was being carried by teachers and the school. While the temporary nature of my role in the school, and the aims of the research, had encouraged the fairly rapid development of rapport, these also set limits on its development. Once the interviews were finished, I no longer had any role in the school, and there were no longer any social structures to sustain further relationships with the children.

### 3.3 Data collection

#### The research setting

I carried out my research in two middle schools serving working class council housing estates in the new town in south-east England where I live. I refer to these schools as Camdean (used in the three day pilot study) and Lakeside (my main study school). The local area has a mixture of urban and rural features. New estates abut directly onto



farmland and countryside, and the out of school activities of children in my study reflected this intermingling of urban and rural environmental features. Many of the first inhabitants of the new town came from the urban overspill of the poorest inner London boroughs, but in recent years the local authority has been anxious to promote an upwardly mobile middle class image. In line with national government policy, many of the former council houses have been sold to private owners or housing associations, and most newcomers now move into private or joint ownership accommodation. The catchment areas of the schools in my study, however, still contained a higher proportion of council housing; a 1994 local Borough Council document reports 65% of housing in Lakeside is council owned, as opposed to 21% in the borough as a whole.

I chose schools that were 96% monolingual because a multilingual setting would have raised a range of issues relating to language, social practices, knowledge and identity which are beyond the scope of this thesis. The estate served by my main study school is seen by many as the least desirable place to live in the area; it has relatively high rates of unemployment and crime, and a high proportion of single parent families. Few of the children I studied were born on the estate, and many had moved home four or five times, often as a result of the break-up or reconstitution of family units. My decision to research the language use of working class children was motivated by a desire to challenge monolithic notions of both working class language and the working class child, fuelled by 'language deprivation' work in the 1960s and Bernstein's concept of the 'restricted code' (1971). While it is probable that the language practices of many children's homes do not prepare them well for specific language usages required in school (Heath, 1983), in a broader sense all children are learning to use

language for a wide range of personal and social purposes, and I believed that if I could demonstrate the complexity and diversity of this broader use among working class children, then it would be accepted that this held for other children as well. I chose to focus on the 10-12 year old age group because of their transitional status between childhood and adolescence; I was interested to find out how their language use might reveal the cultural knowledge and understandings they had already acquired, and how they might be trying out and negotiating new kinds of practices and perspectives. Middle schools offer a unique opportunity to observe this process, since children remain there a year longer than in the traditional British primary school, and move on to secondary school at twelve rather than at eleven years old. I focused initially on a girl in the pilot study because of the growing interest within linguistics in feminist issues and women's talk (see for example Cameron 1985, Coates 1986). In the main study I broadened my investigation of gender issues, looking at talk among both boys and girls, across different contexts and in different kinds of gender groupings.

The pilot and main study schools both consist of clusters of light airy two-storey buildings, built in the 1970s and surrounded by grass playing fields. Each school had about three hundred 8-12 year old pupils at the time of my study, and both school's philosophies were child-centred, with staff seeing themselves as teaching particularly needy pupils. The class teacher of the group I observed in Camdean in my pilot study, for instance, told me that the school contained mainly lower ability children with language problems: 'I find language a great problem here. They'll come and ask for words and they've got the wrong letter cause they've got dictionaries and they just don't say the words properly so that is very difficult. I don't think it's just accent or

dialect....I think that a lot of them, ..... nobody actually bothers to actually talk to them. Very limited their language that they use'. And in Lakeside, my main study school, a booklet entitled 'Aims, philosophy and classroom practice' states: 'it must be recognised ..that many of our pupils come from an environment which has produced a lack of self-motivation, poor linguistic skills, limited social awareness and a lack of self-discipline. The children also experience social problems of a varying nature'. In both schools staff were generally caring and dedicated, and the head teachers were very supportive of my research.

### **Pilot study**

For my pilot study in Camdean, I focused on the conversations of a ten year old girl, Julie, described by her class teacher as a fairly 'typical' average-ability talkative child (I was anxious to avoid possible diversion into educational issues of 'special needs', or 'high achievement'). I fixed a radio microphone on Julie (she carried the transmitter in the pocket of her skirt or shorts) and recorded all her conversations from when she arrived in school at 8.45am until she left for home at 3.00pm, over three consecutive days in June. The microphone picked up everything Julie said, including, for instance, sotto voce comments to her neighbour while the teacher was addressing the class, and everything that was said to her, or within her hearing. I used a small personal cassette recorder to record other children in the class and this was also carried around by various children at break-time. I made observation notes as unobtrusively as possible from the back of the classroom, and collected copies of texts read or written by the children being recorded. On the third day I talked with Julie, a friend of hers called Kirsty and a number of other children about some of the topics cropping up on the tapes. This pilot



research was written up as an MA Dissertation (Maybin 1987), and laid the groundwork in both theoretical and methodological terms for my longer study. The use of the radio microphone and small cassette recorders proved highly successful in capturing children's spontaneous talk, and my observations and collections of texts provided important contextual information. The discussion on the third day (initiated by the children) provided valuable information about their perspectives, and I decided to include informal interviews as a more substantial element in the longer study.

The data I collected from Julie and her friends convinced me of the potential richness of the relatively under-researched area of children's informal talk. Since I used the same approach and methods in both schools, which have similar catchment areas (my main study being in essence an extended version of my pilot), I have incorporated my findings from the pilot together with those from the main study, in the remaining chapters within this thesis. Transcript examples from Camdean figure Julie or her friend Kirsty, and all other examples come from the main study, in Lakeside. Although I used the radio microphone to focus on specific groups of friends, many examples also come from children recorded using the small personal cassette recorders.

### **Main study**

In Lakeside I carried out a similar but longer study over three weeks in the autumn term, focusing on two groups of friends: three girls, Karen (11), Linda (10) and Helen (10), and three boys, Martie (11), Darren (12) and Gary (11). These children each wore the radio microphone for two to three days, carrying the transmitter in a (then fashionable) bumbag strapped around their waist (see Appendix 9 for

child's picture of how the microphone and bumbag were worn). Again, other children used a small personal cassette recorder to collect additional recordings in class and at break (this has the additional benefit of deflecting interest from the child wearing the radio microphone), and I made observation notes and collected copies of texts used or produced by the pupils. I also took photographs of the children, the classroom and the area surrounding the school. A small number of children brought me examples of vernacular writing from out of school, and three children who had asked me for tapes to record themselves playing with friends or talking to their family at home returned their recordings to me. I did not expect to use these home recordings in the research, but in fact have drawn on one tape for the discussion about context and genre in Chapter Four.

Besides managing the tapes, making notes and copying the texts children used or produced, I spent most of my time in the classroom helping those children who were not being recorded, with their work. I was propelled into participating more fully in classroom life in Lakeside than in Camdean because not to would have meant explicitly challenging the Lakeside pupils' expectations that adults were there to help them, and because of the boredom of sitting for lengthy periods observing from the side of the classroom (cf McLaren 1986: 'I found that after about an hour I would go almost into a trance state, unable to concentrate on my field notes' p.111). Absorption into the social activities of a group is in some contexts arguably less disruptive than being a constantly present observer, and the rapport and trust I built up with children over my three week period in the classroom contributed considerably to the success of the interviews later.

I spent break and lunch time catching up with my notes and tape labelling, and talking to the children. I played back extracts of their

tapes to any child who asked to hear them, and midway through the first week I played a couple of extracts of pupil-teacher dialogue to Mrs. K. and talked with her about how this was supporting pupil learning. After this she seemed quite happy about my role in the classroom, and I had very little subsequent direct contact with her, or indeed with any of the other teachers. This was partly due to everybody's general busyness, and partly due to a conscious decision on my part to mix as far as was possible exclusively with the children, in order to make the most of my time in the school.

I arranged with the school to return the following term, after I had listened to the tapes, in order to record interviews with the thirty four children in the class, about themes on the tapes and their own personal interests. I initially planned these interviews to provide useful background information about the different layers of context for the previously recorded talk, but they also unexpectedly generated a rich variety of anecdotes, accounts and explanations about various aspects of children's lives. The interviews (recorded on a small personal cassette recorder) lasted between thirty and sixty minutes, and were held in the relative discomfort of the school store room, the designated area for smoking in the school but also the only available private space. I carried out the first two interviews with individual children (Martie and Darren), but although rapport was good, I found them relatively unforthcoming, and did not feel I was able to gather much contextual material. When the next child, Karlie, asked if she could bring Nicole with her, I agreed, and found that the combination of two friends with an attentive adult produced far more useful information, and far more informal talk and 'native language explanations' (Spradley 1979 p59). The presence of a friend seemed to create a more informal, egalitarian atmosphere in the interviews



which was particularly conducive to children producing accounts of personal experience (for instance at times children ignored a question from me to carry on discussing an issue between themselves), and children often supported or confirmed each other's accounts. I interviewed all the remaining children in friendship pairs, with the exception of one boy, Alan, who elected to be interviewed on his own. It is to my lasting regret that I did not re-interview Martie and Darren together, but I did not at that stage realise I would be using the interview recordings as additional direct informal language data. Both boys produced rich material in the November continuous recordings in relation to narrative, recorded speech and collaborative strategies, and it would have been very useful to have been able to compare this with their talk together in an interview.

Spradley (1979) suggests that in order to gather the information needed to document and analyse a particular cultural context, the ethnographic interviewer should ask what he terms descriptive questions, structural questions and contrast questions. The interview also involves greetings and taking leave and asking 'friendly questions' (it is itself a particular kind of language event), giving explanations about the research, the recording or the interview itself, the expression of interest and cultural ignorance, the repeating of informant's statements, and the incorporation of their terms into new questions or hypothetical situations posed. Descriptive questions are for Spradley the backbone of the ethnographic interview, and they were particularly important in my own case since I wanted to elicit accounts and explanations of children's own experience. I covered a rough list of topics with each child: who they lived with at home and where else they had lived before, what they did after school and how they used reading and writing outside school. I also asked them to

comment on topics which had cropped up on the tapes recorded over my previous three weeks in school. These included justice and fairness, boyfriends and girlfriends, clubs and gangs, swapping, and using bad language and slang. Spradley divides descriptive questions into grand tour questions, mini-tour questions, example questions, experience questions and native language questions. Grand tour questions are general and wide ranging. For instance, I asked children 'Who else lives in your house?' 'Tell me about what kinds of things you do when you get home from school in the afternoons' 'Do you have any pets?'. The answers to these often opened up the opportunity for the more specific, detailed mini-tour questions, for example 'How did you get to know your boyfriend?' 'You've built shelves in the shed?' 'What's it like going to see your dad in prison?' 'Who would you swear in front of?' where children focused in on specific experiences, providing accounts that were particularly interesting in terms of their narrative and collaborative structures. As Sparsely points out, it is sometimes useful to ask a 'task-related question': I asked Sam and Simon to draw me a plan for the garden shed they had turned into a museum, and Terry spontaneously drew a chart to show me how he recorded his work on car parts.

My interviews were rather more informant-led than Spradley's procedures would suggest; in almost every case one or both children at some point introduced a topic which was of immediate concern to them, and in each case I encouraged the child to expand on this, in addition to talking about my own list of themes, most of which I tended to insert into the ongoing conversation, once the interview got going. I asked directly about the meaning of particular terms or phrases used by children (Spradley's 'native language' question), for instance 'What does it mean 'going out with someone'?' 'What does

'being grounded' involve?' In each case, however, the child would fall back on his or her own specific experience, answering as if it were an 'Example question' (ie giving an instance when they went out with someone, or were grounded). I endeavoured therefore to get at children's notions of justice and so on through relating questions to specific incidents, so I would ask 'Have you been told off recently, then?' 'Do you think that's a fair rule, then?'. And because of children's orientation to specific, recent experience, I did not ask Spradley's very broad, open-ended 'experience questions' (the example he gives is 'can you tell me about some experiences you have had as a directory assistance operator?' (op cit p88)).

Although I used Spradley's 'Descriptive questions' extensively in the interviews, I did not draw on the two other kinds of questions he identifies. Spradley's 'Structural Questions' are orientated towards analysing and verifying cultural domains which are significant to his informants. These check the range of meanings of specific terms, and sort them into different groups. Similarly, 'Contrast questions' are aimed at finding out how the meaning of a particular symbol differs from that of others within the 'folk taxonomy', so that the ethnographer can develop and refine his or her knowledge of different cultural domains. As I discussed earlier in the chapter, my own research was not aimed so much at uncovering a coherent set of cultural understandings for a particular group, as at documenting the interactive communicative processes involved in children's diverse and ongoing negotiations of meaning. I was not attempting an exhaustive analysis of the children's cultural setting, but collecting the contextual information needed to analyse specific language events in the data. Children's answers to the descriptive questions I asked in the interviews provided important contextual information about their



experiences and how they evaluated these (Volosinov 1986), and also provided additional examples of the communicative processes I was investigating.

### 3.4 Processing and analysing the data

My data when I left the school included:

- sixty hours of tapes from the continuous recordings and twenty hours from the interviews,
- copies of the worksheets children used and the written work they produced while being recorded,
- my field notes and photographs
- the few tapes and pieces of vernacular writing which children gave me from out of school.

I have drawn on all these resources throughout writing up the research, but at the core of my work has been the transcribing and analysis of the tapes. While repeated listening to the tapes has been important to interpret the prosodic features which convey so much of the emotional charge in talk, and to capture the children's situated perspectives, it was also through the actual work of transcription and retranscription that I began to recognise the recurring patterns of language use through which these children made sense of experience, and constructed their relationships. Because of the sheer volume of the recordings, and the sections which are difficult to decipher, my transcribed data (about forty hours worth) is obviously not a complete record of children's language experience in school during the periods covered by the three days' pilot and the three weeks' main study. Nor have I had access to their use of language outside the school (with the

few exceptions of the tapes they brought in). I am not in a position, therefore, to make generalisations about collaborative language practices right across these 10-12 year-olds' everyday lives. The amount of data transcribed, however, is sufficient to show patterns of language use recurring across different language events, and also to illustrate the ways in which particular usages are adapted to and shaped by different contextual settings.

Listening to, transcribing and analysing the tapes was a recursive and iterative business, also involving the use of related observation notes, texts and photographs. Since I wanted to identify patterns in children's use of language across different language events and contexts, I focused on exchanges between children where a topic was sustained across a number of turns, and the recordings were clear enough for me to transcribe what each speaker was saying. (At times too many children were talking for me to be able to transcribe accurately, or the recording was unclear because children were involved in strenuous physical activity at break or in games, and this tended to interfere with the transmitting signal). I therefore focused initially on transcribing the most decipherable language events in the classroom, corridors, canteen, changing rooms, assembly hall, playground, and school coach. In addition, I initially transcribed as much as I could of six complete days' worth of recordings: three consecutive days for Julie in the pilot study, and three consecutive days focusing in turn on Darren, Martie and Gary in the main study. Through doing this continuous transcribing across a number of days, I began to get a sense of the interconnections between language events across time (since Darren, Martie and Gary were friends who often talked and did things together, I could track linking experiences for all three across their three consecutive days). At this point I also started

writing preliminary papers on my findings, and found some series of transcripts particularly suggestive in terms of the features which I was beginning to recognise, for instance children's use of other voices, and their collaborative negotiation of meaning. I returned to the tapes again to relisten to these extracts, and to transcribe further stretches on either side of the exchange. I also became interested in the language use of specific children, for instance Julie's picaresque stories, and went back again to the transcripts and tapes to find further extracts. I found that in each repeated listening to a stretch of tape I would notice something new within the actual language text; for instance a child's repetition of a structure to express a subtle orientation to others which I had not previously recognised, or a switching of perspective framing within a single turn. Rather than just listening to the talk, I began to 'listen in' to the complex, fluid patterns of relating to others, negotiating meanings and trying out particular aspects of identity, which the talk seemed to be carrying. Thus my transcribing and analysis were not done at one specific stage in the research, but were recurrent activities right up until the final draft of the thesis, interwoven with the other activities of reading, writing and discussing the work with others. In ethnographic terms, the transcription and analysis of the data, and writing up the research both for academic papers and for drafts of the thesis, drove the process of grounded theorising. Although Zaharlick and Green (1991) see the first two stages of ethnography, that is planning and fieldwork, as the 'discovery phase', and the third stage as to do with presentation of information and findings, (p211), in my own case the discovery phase extended through the transcription and analysis of data into the writing up of the research. While there is now a considerable literature about the ways in which the writing of



ethnography constructs the social group studied for a particular audience (Clifford and Marcus 1986, De Castell and Walker 1991, Atkinson 1990), I would argue that writing also has a rather different kind of generative role within the ethnographic investigation in the sense that the struggle to organise information and insights into the rhetorical structures of written academic argument itself produces new insights, and reveals further connections and patterns. (cf Scardamalia and Bereiter 1985).

Children's interconnected use of reported speech, narrative, contextual and intertextual references, and collaborative communicative strategies, all of which are discussed in detail in later chapters, became gradually clearer each time I trawled through the transcripts. From this data, I gradually narrowed my focus to a number of generative examples as 'telling cases' (Mitchell 1984), in relation to the insights emerging from my analysis. As Mitchel puts it, 'the particular circumstances surrounding a case, serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent... Case studies allow analysts to show how general regularities exist precisely when specific contextual circumstance are taken account of.' (op cit p239). The examples I have chosen to quote from my data, of narrative, reported speech and interactive collaboration illustrate aspects of language use which are repeated across the data. At the same time, these examples also illustrate how these general patterns are realised in specific circumstances; for instance how a narrative structure is used to explore different evaluative perspectives in the context of a child's presentation of herself to me in an interview, or how reported speech is used to express degrees of commitment to particular sources of authority, in talk to a friend around a particular classroom activity.

The ways in which reported voices are reproduced in line with the reporter's purposes (Volosinov 1973, Tannen 1989) is a major concern throughout this thesis. Tylor (1986) has pointed out that when ethnographers quote the voices of people they have observed or interviewed, they are also always representing those voices, and by implication the people to whom they belong. Since my transcribed examples provide the main evidence for my argument in the thesis, I was particularly concerned that they should constitute as accurate a record as possible of specific language events, and also that they should convey to the reader a sense of 'being there', of *vraisemblance* which would enable them to enter, as far as possible, the everyday shared reality of the children I studied. This *vraisemblance*, as Atkinson (1990) points out, is particularly important within ethnographic accounts, which convey authority and conviction through such verbal rhetorical devices rather than through the numerical rhetoric of statistics and tables.

I have explained how I tracked particular children, themes and interactive practices throughout the data, and chose examples to present within the thesis. The boundaries of these examples are determined by topic switches, or by periods of silence. Ochs (1979) has pointed out that translating oral talk into written transcription involves a number of decisions, each carrying theoretical implications. She argues that column format is useful for tracking one speaker's contributions over a period of time and enabling the analyst to search for a wide variety of cohesive links which may be masked in the play script layout. There is, however, a difficulty in the association of leftness with priority and inception which may skew the reader's perceptions of an interaction (Ochs *op cit*), difficulties in readability where there are more than three columns, and, in relation to my own

data, the practical problem of having to create complete columns for speakers who may only dip into a conversation for a couple of turns. Rather than focusing on the contributions of single speakers, I wanted to use a dialogic framework to look at talk as a collaborative accomplishment, and in many cases in my data there is an important relationship between sequential turns, for example where two children collaborate in producing a narrative. Although I am interested in looking at the function of intertextual links, these could well be to a much earlier part of the conversation than the transcribed extract, or to another conversation altogether. Again, I am interested in how children use talk to regulate and pursue relationships with others, but this involves a complex interaction between structure, function and interactive strategies (see Chapter Six), which would not be captured any more clearly in column than in play script format. Coates (1991, 1996) uses a layout similar to a musical score to show the polyphonic nature of women's talk together, where a number of speakers share the floor, and produce turns collaboratively. Although the children's talk I recorded is highly collaborative in a number of ways, however, the kind of polyphonic cooperation documented by Coates is relatively rare, as I shall explain in Chapter Six. In terms of the language practices on which I am focusing, the play script format has proved the most appropriate to show the linguistic strategies used by children, and their patterns of collaboration, within language events.

In dividing talk up into speaker turns within the transcript, I have tried to document even minimal interruptions within the continuous recordings from across the school day, because the choppy, interactive, cross-cutting style of many of these conversations is a significant aspect of the way in which meaning is collaboratively



constructed. I have therefore given each child's contribution, however brief, a separate line. Many of these brief contributions were missing in my initial transcript; I had unconsciously edited them out, and it was only on the third or fourth listening that I actually heard them. I would suggest that a theoretically disciplined and socially conditioned view of talk as expressing the thoughts of individual speakers filters out many of the interactive aspects of conversation, which become increasingly apparent when a more dialogical theory-driven analytic approach is adopted. In transcribing children's longer and more discursive turns from the interviews, however, where the function of my own minimal responses (eg 'yes', 'em') was to convey understanding and to encourage the child to keep talking, I have left these back channel remarks, in brackets, within the child's turn, so as not to break the flow of their account for the reader. Back channel remarks from other children within these longer accounts are treated in the same way.

In some studies of classroom dialogue, transcripts include a column of context notes which refer to aspects of the physical context implicated within the talk (for example Edwards and Mercer 1987). I found that children's talk around particular classroom tasks often referred to other texts, for example a worksheet, or their own writing, and, in such cases quoted within the thesis, I have included a copy of the written text. But, apart from this, the children's talk very rarely needs detailed notes concerning the physical context to make it comprehensible to the reader. As I shall show later in the thesis, the talk creates its own context, richly supported and made more complex through a range of intertextual links. Thus I did not find it necessary to include context notes, other than very occasionally (see list of transcript conventions at the beginning of this thesis). Nor did I feel

that it was necessary to code the precise lengths of pauses, or provide a detailed documentation of intonation patterns. While these are obviously an intrinsic part of interaction, and fulfil vital communicative functions, my own interest in collaboration focusses on the linguistic structure and the meaning of children's talk, and only in very general terms on conversation management issues. I have indicated prosodic features where appropriate, for example in relation to a child's expression of irony, or their mimicking of a different pitched voice. In order to make the transcripts more readable, I have added some written punctuation.

I have recorded children's non-standard grammatical expressions as accurately as possible, but not the effects of their accents on the pronunciation of particular words. The unmarked norm within English literature is to present dialogue in a tidied up, standardised form, and representations of non-standard accent and dialect carry all sorts of social connotations (often stigmatising) for the reader (for example see Preston's 1985 criticism of American folklorists' representation of their subjects' speech). I believed that standardising children's grammatical usage would be inconsistent with the heteroglossic argument within the thesis, but that explicitly marking accent, when this was not important to the focus of my research, was contentious given the notorious irregularity of phoneme-grapheme relationships within English<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> In contrast, in Rampton's study (1995) of adolescents switching between different language varieties, where accent is a salient feature of the analysis, he provides a phonetic transcription at the key crossing points in his transcribed examples.

### 3.5 Conclusion

I have explained my reasons for adopting an ethnographic perspective in relation to my theoretical position and the aims of my research. My methodology has been informed mainly by work in the ethnography of communication tradition, and is driven additionally by Russian sociohistorical ideas concerning heteroglossia, dialogicality and intertextuality. Thus, I am focusing on events and practices, and looking for recurring patterns in terms of uses of language, interactional relationships and ways of orientating to texts and knowledge. But I am also looking at the dialogic and intertextual relations within and across language events, and treating knowledge, identity, text and context as in the process of being interactionally negotiated, rather than as fixed entities. I have also described my fieldwork experience in the school, including the dynamics of my relationship with the children, which has shaped the kind of data I collected, and my own view of it (Sanjek 1990).

Marcus and Fisher (1986) see dialogue, both in empirical and metaphorical terms, as central to anthropological work. In my own research I am focusing on dialogues among children, and the development of dialogic analysis is a major aim within the thesis. There is also the dialogue between the anthropologist and their informants which provides the basis for collecting and contextualising data, both within the interviews, and on an informal day to day basis. Marcus and Fisher point to the dialogue going on inside anthropologists' heads as they interpret their observations and experiences, and I have also described the internal dialogues involved in my own iterative and recursive transcription and analysis of the tapes. In addition, for Marcus and Fisher, there is the dialogue



between the anthropologist and others 'back home' through the vehicle of the ethnographic text, and, beyond that, the dialogue between different cultures which are a result of the whole enterprise. My dialogues with others through the writing of academic papers and earlier drafts of this thesis have contributed in important ways to the development of my analysis. Finally, the completed thesis is intended as a further contribution to dialogues at a broader level among educationalists and social scientists about models of communication, ways of collecting and analysing talk, and relationships between language, learning and identity.

## Chapter Four: The context of talk

### 4.1 Introduction

In this and the next two chapters, I shall analyse findings from my research to extend the discussion of three central issues which emerged from the review of theory in Chapter Two. In Chapter Four I consider the relationship between talk and context, in Chapter Five the heteroglossic nature of speech, and in Chapter Six the ways in which meanings are negotiated dialogically and collaboratively. These issues will all be revisited in the later chapters on narrative and literacy, but I want at this point to explore them more fully in relation to the full range of language practices I recorded, both from children's talk throughout the day, and from my interviews with friendship pairs. I shall argue that these three issues are all central to understanding how children's informal language practices contribute to their construction of knowledge and identity.

In this chapter, I shall use Bakhtin and Foucault's conceptions of what might be called the discursive context, together with ethnographic conceptions of social and cultural context, and ideas from conversation analysis which suggest a more dynamic and interactive notion of the relationship between talk and context within specific encounters.

Drawing on ideas from Bakhtin and Halliday, I shall use the term 'genre' to include the text medium(s) (I focus on spoken and written aspects of medium in my data, but medium can also be visual or kinaesthetic), the way language is used (for example vocabulary and grammatical forms, phonology, text presentation), type of content, and the relationship between the producer(s) and audience(s). I shall take

examples from the data to look first at different kinds of interrelationships between text and context, and I shall then focus on how children's ongoing talk itself constructs, negotiates and shifts the conversational frames of knowledge and meaning which give them particular positions and power within an interaction.

## 4.2 Interrelationships between talk and context

I shall use the first example below to introduce some of the possible interrelationships between the text of an utterance, and various contextual and intertextual features. These can include the physical surroundings, the social event of which the conversation is a part and broader cultural values and expectations, the relationship between speakers, their past shared experience, and current conversational goals. It can also include the context created by the conversation itself, through its generic and discursive form, and the intertextual links invoked by words and phrases.

It is a few minutes to three in the afternoon in Camdean (school is due to finish at three o'clock) and the large sunny classroom is littered with the detritus from the afternoon's activities, when pupils have been recording and mounting the results of a scavenging hunt in the school grounds. In the evening, parents will be visiting the school to meet teachers and talk about their children's progress. At the moment a few children are doing some desultory tidying, while the majority are sitting expectantly at their tables, waiting for the bell to signal the end of the school day. Miss P. is pacing, increasingly irately, around the room:



Miss P. What are your parents going to think, coming into a mess like this? Well they're not coming into a mess like this. Tough. You sit there and I'll clear up. And when I've finished, you can go home. OK?

Some (uncertain) yea

pupils no

(pause while T moves round room)

Miss P. Or are you going to cooperate?

Pupils (a few girls' voices) Cooperate

Miss P. I think about ten people in this room are doing clearing up. I said at the beginning that I wanted all of this work first of all put over the back. I've had five people come to me (*mimics whining voice*) 'What do we do with our work?' Which proves what?

More ps Not listening

Pupil Not listening

Miss P. You just don't bother to listen. There's buckets and things all over the place, mess around, floor's a disgrace. Now there is FIVE minutes and you're not going because you've got trays out. I suggest that you get cleaned up NOW. Anybody messing around will be in trouble.

The physical context is especially important here because an aspect of it (ie the mess) is the immediate subject of the exchange. One of the most common ways of referring to one's physical surroundings is verbal deixis. Deixis has been described as the 'single most obvious way in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in the structure of languages themselves' (Levinson 1983 p54), and 'a central aspect of the verbal matrix of orientation and perception through which speakers produce context' (Hanks 1992 p70). It is used extensively by teachers and children to focus attention on specific features of tasks and texts in class work, and it is also common at the opening of children's spontaneous narratives, to signal a change away from the present into a different kind of context (for example 'There was this man...'). In the example above, Miss P's

intensive and repeated use of deictic terms in her first turn ('this' 'you', 'your', 'I' and 'there') clearly signals the context and subject of her harangue: the state of the classroom, the fact that parents will be visiting it later and her displeasure with the children (the use of 'I' and 'you' here contrasts with her use of 'we' on other occasions). The focus is ostensibly on the here and now (the mess), but viewed also from the perspective of the future, ie the impending parental visit, invoked by Miss P at the beginning of her first turn. Miss P also refers to a third context, using what I would argue is another important way of managing orientation and perception to produce context, that is, reported speech. Reported speech, as I shall explain in more detail in the next chapter, can invoke particular areas of social experience; it can, as it were, stand in for scenarios, relationships and evaluative viewpoints. Here, when Miss P mimics a child's whining voice 'What do we do with our work?', she is reminding pupils of exchanges she has had with them during the lesson, and of the confusion and disorder which has characterised the last twenty minutes. She is also implicitly referring to similar conversations from other occasions (hence the pupils' rapid recognition of the response she wants: 'not listening'). Finally, her exaggerated caricature of the childish voice leaves no doubt about her own disapproval and frustration with their current behaviour.

While Miss P uses various linguistic strategies to invoke aspects of the current context, and of other contexts, the meaning here, both of particular words and phrases, and of Miss P's overall message, is directly related to their immediate context within a school classroom where teachers and pupils conform to particular 'norms of interaction', and can assume certain kinds of shared experience and values (Hymes). The meaning of putting work 'over the back', having trays

out and indeed of 'clearing up' and 'messaging around' are all clear to pupils in terms of established procedures and relationships within the classroom (though Miss P's final more explicit description of the mess suggests she did feel a need to clarify what needed to be cleared up).

If we take one utterance, the teacher's question 'Or are you going to cooperate?', we can see how its meaning comes, as Hymes suggests, from the various different layers of social and cultural context. Within its context as part of a harangue by a teacher at pupils, the children (or at least some of them) know that this is not actually a question, but a direction. The use of the term 'cooperate' is consistent with the school policy of encouraging pupil autonomy and self respect, but in this context is more or less synonymous with 'do as I tell you'. At this point in the day, when the teacher wants the classroom tidied and the children want to go home, the pupils know that the teacher has a certain amount of institutional power to keep them there until what she wants has been done. She would not automatically have this coercive power in other contexts, although she might choose to invoke her authority as a teacher. So both the propositional content and the illocutionary force of Miss P's question depend on their context within a telling off, in a classroom, in a particular school, in a community where teachers are respected and expected to be strict.

Miss P's classes often started and ended with a few public reprimands or a general 'dressing down'. Some of the boys publicly challenged her authority during these harangues and were punished by having privileges withdrawn (for example being excluded from physical education, or from the scavenging hunt) or, on one occasion, being sent to the head teacher's office. This kind of recurring ritual public reprimand seemed to provide a secure framework within which pupils generally carried on with their work in a fairly relaxed and



happy manner. Children's remarks (see examples in next chapter) suggested that they felt this kind of language behaviour was appropriate for teachers in the classroom context. It demonstrated strictness, which was part of being a good teacher. It periodically made the institutional norms which operated in the school more explicit, and activated sanctions against those who failed to conform. This partly explains why pupils, once they realise the kind of language event it is, cooperate fairly readily in the dialogue Miss P sets up (for example producing the responses 'cooperate' and 'not listening'). In this sense they respond to the context created by a familiar genre; the teacher's tone of voice, the subject matter, the kind of responses she is cueing and the threat at the end all mark this as a recognisable language event, a reprimand about inappropriate pupil behaviour. Pupils are positioned within this kind of discourse as relatively powerless and silenced; the only way to resist is through non-participation, or a deliberate breaking of the frame (Goffman 1974), for instance through diverting the teacher's attention in some way or through a direct challenge as in the case of the boys I mentioned earlier.

The example above shows that children can recognise and produce the kind of responses required for this particular kind of classroom language event. They are also of course capable of quite different kinds of language behaviour in other contexts. As Labov (1972) points out, speakers display varying degrees of formality in their language use, expressed through phonology, grammar, vocabulary and topic choice across different social contexts, and to different audiences. In terms of topic sensitivity to context, I was struck in analysing the children's spontaneous conversational narratives by how a story would be sparked off by some aspect of the general physical context,

and then followed by a chain of stories from other children on similar or related topics. For instance the stories I recorded while children were in the school coach on their way to swimming were all about experiences involving different kinds of transport: a father's new car, going on the back of a friend's motor bike, riding on a plane; children then moved onto other accounts about being high up and looking down. On another occasion, the testing of a fire alarm in the classroom one morning prompted stories (exchanged while children carried on working) of experiences of climbing out of buildings, and jumping off roofs. These brief stories and anecdotes were all of a similar narrative genre, which I shall look at more closely in Chapter Seven, but there were other instances where the generic form of a child's story telling was rather different. I want to look now at two longer fantasy stories produced by the same eleven year old girl in Lakeside on two consecutive days, in contrasting contexts. Michelle recorded herself playing in her bedroom with a four year old cousin, Natalie, and a ten year old friend, Sharon. In this recording Michelle constructs a long imaginary story about a friendly dragon called Frederick and a little girl called Cinderella, and the story is acted out spontaneously by herself and the other two children. The next morning in school when she brought me the tape, Michelle asked if she could record a second story at break time with another girl in the class, Josie (twelve years). This second story was called 'Cinderella and the fierce dragon'. What interested me was that although both stories started out with similar characters, the way they developed in terms of plot, characterisation and linguistic features seems closely tied to the context of their production and performance. Although there are literary points which can be made about plot and characterisation, I shall focus here on the relations between text, genre and context, and suggest that the two

stories' rather different generic qualities are related to their contextualisation within different kinds of social practices. In other words, social process is encoded within the text.

Both stories were enacted by Michelle first cueing the other children as to what they should say, and these children then gradually taking over their own characters, and producing their own dialogue. I shall look first at the story made up by Michelle at home with her friend Sharon and her cousin Natalie. This is how it starts:

Michelle The friendly dragon, which is called Frederick. Once upon a time there was a little girl called Cinderella and she -she was playing out the front. (*sound of soft humming*) And then she bumped into a dragon (*Natalie laughs*) and the Dragon said 'hallo',

Sharon 'Hallo'

Michelle And the little girl said 'hallo'

Natalie 'Hallo'

Michelle 'what's your name?'

Natalie 'What's your name?' (

Natalie (cued by Michelle) asks her mother (played by Michelle) if the dragon (Sharon) can come in to play, and the mother then agrees and 'sells' him some apples. The dragon gets a stomach ache, and mother gives him a drink of water. By this time Sharon has fully taken over the part of the dragon, with Natalie still being partly cued:

Michelle Oh no!

Natalie What?

Michelle You've dirtied all my cups and I ain't got none for my cup a tea.

Sharon I know what, I can clean them up for you

Michelle What?

Sharon Oh, my paws are dirty aaw



Michelle *(to Natalie, in high voice)* Can you wash up for me please, darling?

Natalie Yes. *(sound of crockery)* Where's the cloth to do it?  
*(pause and continuing sound of crockery)*

Michelle You washed up yet?

Natalie Yes

Michelle Good girl! We've got enough. Oh for a cup of tea! Do you want a cup of tea?

Sharon No thank you, it's time I must be going

Michelle 'Where do you live'

Sharon /Out in

Michelle /the little girl said

Natalie Where do you live?

Sharon Out in the black dark forest

Michelle The little girl said 'Do you like living out there?'

Natalie Do you like living out there?

Sharon No, it's cold and I have to suffer

The dragon stays with the little girl and her mother, and there follow a number of domestic incidents where he breaks the bed, keeps them awake snoring, and gets pushed over in the garden by Natalie and hurts his head. Despite the title of the story, the dragon is in fact quite an ambiguous character, by turns frightening, a buffoon, and piteous. Finally the story ends with Michelle announcing that the dragon was 'allowed to live with us again. And we were all one good happy family'.

This story is constructed mainly of linked domestic scenarios around common themes in children's imaginary play at home; giving visitors cups of tea, washing up, playing shop, mothering, and pretending to squabble. Michelle, Sharon and Natalie draw on their own shared experience of domestic life to produce a genre of story which is very close to 'playing house'. Questions like 'Can you wash up for me please, darling?' and 'Do you want a cup of tea?' sound as if they are directly appropriated from observations of daily life at home. The dragon, who

comes from a rather different fairy tale world, sometimes uses language reflecting his own generic origins ('the black dark forest', 'it's cold and I have to suffer'), but overall throughout the story, it is the cosy world of the mother and daughter's home which predominates, and this is reflected in the plot, characterisation, and language register.

Although the story which Michelle produces next day in school at break time with Josie is also about a little girl called Cinderella and a dragon whom she wants to befriend, it has rather a different generic feel. The girls recorded themselves in the 'quiet room', a screened off space next to the classroom which contained the computer, overhead projector and class library. As this story is much shorter, I shall include the complete text:

Michelle 'Cinderella and the live dragon'. Right. (*short pause*).  
 Right. Cinderella (*whispers*) hoy, come on (*story voice again*) 'Cinderella and the fierce dragon' by Michelle and Josie. Here it starts. Once upon a time the little princess went for a walk. (*sound of skipping along*) Diddly, diddly, diddly

Josie / diddly diddly

Michelle /Then she met this terrible, green dragon. (*roars*). And then she goes (*high voice*) 'Oh dear green dragon oh'- on her knees-she goes- 'Oh dear green Dragon oh dear oh dear please don't harm me'

Josie (*high voice*) Oh dear green Dragon oh dear oh dear please don't harm me

Michelle And then the poor dragon started crying (*sound of crying*). 'Why are you crying little dragon?' Princess said

Josie Why are you crying, little dragon?

Michelle (*miserable high voice*) Because I've got no friends

Josie I'll be your friend

Michelle Will you? I will not eat you up

Josie Come on, I'm-let's go cherry picking. That's where I was going

Michelle Come on. So they went cherry picking. (*sound of 'la la' skipping*). Cherry picking indeed! Then (*dramatic voice*)-they see- the dragon's mother! 'Oh mummy, mummy, meet my new friend, my new friend'. (*deeper voice*) 'What is her what is her name?' Oh well

Josie Cinderella

Michelle Cinderella was really really frightened so she ran back home as fast

Josie /Mummy!

Michelle /as she could screaming 'Mummy'

Josie /Mummy

Michelle /'Mummy mummy mummy mummy' and all that night and all that day the Cinderella was frightened. One night when she was fast asleep Cinderella woke up in surprise.

Josie Oh!

Michelle and go 'Oh!'

Josie Oh!

Michelle in a very loud voice. Her mum and dad run in, all the servants run in as well. And then they see the two dragons lying on her bedroom floor dead

Josie (*gasp*).

Michelle (*Dramatic voice*) In amaze she screamed

Josie (*screams*)

Michelle and the two dragons got buried that next morning and never was seen again. The end.

While the friends at home interweave domestic cameos into the story, here in the class library in school Michelle and Josie use scenes and images from fairy tale books. Cinderella in this second story is not a little girl living in a home like Michelle's, but a princess with servants. She does not 'play out the front', but goes 'cherry picking'. Both the narrator's voice and Cinderella's reflect this more literary context (the narrator's 'Cherry picking, indeed!', 'in amaze(ment) she screamed', 'and never was seen again', and Cinderella's 'Oh dear, green dragon, oh



dear oh dear, please don't harm me!') The plot is a kind of new permutation of the one played out only the day before. There is an attempt at making a relationship with the dragon, who is lonely and has no friends, but in the second story this is thwarted by Cinderella's fear of the dragon's mother. And the dragons do finish up in Cinderella's home- even in her bedroom- but they are dead. There is more high drama and tragedy in this second story, the exploration of the dragon's vulnerability is only fleeting (as opposed to the scenes about his stomach ache and hurt head in the bedroom story) and is quickly taken over by the fear of the unknown, and the strange twist at the end. The first story at home undoubtedly provides part of the context for the second story, but whereas the fairy story world is a fairly minor strand in the first instance, it becomes the dominant element in the story told in the school quiet room, reflecting the contents of some of the books lining its walls.

In addition to their different physical contexts, these stories are the outcome of two rather different kinds of social processes. In the bedroom, I would suggest that the primary audience for the story is the children themselves, as they play act together. Michelle told me they often created stories like this, and the smoothness with which the recording develops suggests considerable previous experience. Within the context of imaginary play, the children act out various roles, relationships and dilemmas. The story at school, on the other hand, is more of a public performance; it was created primarily to display the girls' story making abilities to myself, and to Josie's special needs teacher whom they were keen should also hear it. The voices are more heavily dramatised prosodically on the tape and therefore distanced from their producers so that we feel more clearly the presence of the narrator behind the characters' words in this 'double-

voicing' ( Bakhtin 1981). The school story is modelled on a much more literary genre, also reflected in the kinds of voices used by the girls for both the characters and the narrating, and in the vocabulary, register and plot development. The authoritative model which provides a particular way of conceiving and representing the world here is not the children's experience of daily domestic life, but their experience of fantasy literary texts, in school story books and on television. (In Chapter Seven I shall look at a third kind of story produced by Michelle, when she talked in her interview about her father's violence towards her mother. This could be seen as adding another layer of meaning to the ambiguity of the dragon character and the contrasts between interior domesticity and exterior danger in the stories described above).

I have used Michelle's two stories to demonstrate how their different genres emerge from the contexts of their production and performance. Each genre is marked not only by topic and linguistic features, but also, as Bakhtin points out, by different sources of authority and evaluative perspectives; in the first story, domestic harmony is disturbed by the strange visitor, but eventually restored, and the mother's overarching benevolent control is never seriously threatened. In the second, however, much darker, anarchic powers are at large, which are not amenable to normal everyday practices or understandings. I want to explore the way different genres invoke different sources of authority and 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980) further by examining a rather different move by a child between two different contexts, which illustrates how the different ways she uses language are associated with different kinds of positioning and identity for speakers, and with different areas of silence.

In the next example the transcript starts in the mathematics class, where Julie (10 years) is working out how much each of a number of customers in a cafe will have to pay for their meals. She has just added up 'Tom Ato's' bill.

Julie Three pounds twelve I make Tom Ato. Back in a second.  
Miss, can I go to the toilet please?

Miss P Yes alright

*(sound of Julie's heels as she goes down the corridor.  
When she enters the toilets the acoustics on the tape  
change abruptly, with the tiled walls making the voices  
echo. Carol and Nicole are already there)*

Julie Oh, hi. Where did you get your hair permed?

Nicole (.....)

Julie You're not going out with Sasha, are you?

Nicole Yea

Julie Are you?

Nicole Yea, I hope so *(laughs)*

Julie You've got darker skin than me, I've got a sun tan.  
*(pause) (to Carol) I should think so too, it's disgusting,  
that skirt is! Aii ... don't!(Nicole starts tapping her feet on  
the tiled floor) Do you do tap dancing? (both girls start  
tapping their feet and singing)*

J+N 'I just called to say I love you, and I mean it, from the  
bottom of my heart '

Julie Caught you that time, Carol- ooh! What's the matter,  
Carol, don't show your tits! *(laughs) (to Nicole) I went  
like this to Carol, I says, I pulls down her top, I went phtt  
'don't show your tits!' (Nicole laughs).*

*(Julie leaves the toilets, walks down the corridor,  
reenters the classroom, and sits down.)*

Julie Turn over - six plates of chips - oh I've nearly finished  
my book. I've got one page to do.

The conversation in the toilets seems to belong to a different world from that in the mathematics classroom. Children would not normally use explicit sexual terms (or swearwords) in the classroom; their own



sexuality was never referred to directly in any of the formal and rarely in the informal talk which I recorded in the classroom, although it was frequently the subject of talk in other contexts. This area of their identity and experience is in Foucault's terms an area of silence in classroom discourse. (I am not suggesting this as a criticism of classroom discourse, but it does have implications for the way children experience themselves as people within that context). In terms of subject matter, there is a remarkable contrast between on one hand the maths calculation, Julie's request for permission to go to the toilet and her remark about nearly finishing her book in the classroom, and on the other the talk in the toilet which moves from hairstyles to going out with boys to skin colour and sun tanning to a 'disgusting' skirt, tap dancing and showing tits. Like Michelle's contrasting stories discussed above, the talk in the classroom and in the toilets emerges within different kinds of social processes and interactions. In the toilets Julie and her friends are no longer pupils straining to interpret the teacher's instructions and produce neat, acceptable pieces of work which fill up their exercise books, but young adolescents concerned with trying out particular notions of femininity and checking out each other's experience with boys. Personal worth here is determined not by how quickly and accurately sums can be completed, but by how attractive you are to the opposite sex, and how much experience you have had in 'going out' with them. The authoritative voice quoted is not the text book, but the pop song. Those aspects of the children's experience which are considered inappropriate for the classroom spill out in interstitial moments which lie outside the official school curriculum; the institutional authority of the school seems to fall away at the toilet door. Julie, however, makes

the switch between two different kinds of discourse without any apparent effort or hesitation.

Like the contrast between the stories told at home and in the school quiet room, I have suggested that the extract above shows how children's language use is sensitive to changes in physical and social context, and how different genres of talk involve different ways of viewing, representing and evaluating experience. There is a sense of course in which the talk in all the examples above is itself also an important element in constructing and holding the context; even as it is used it establishes a particular kind of generic frame, whether of class reprimand, playing houses, telling fairy stories, doing classroom mathematics work or informally gossiping and teasing. Specific utterances will be interpreted within the context of that frame, which as Goffman puts it, tells us in broad terms 'what is it that's going on, here' (1986, p8).

### **4.3 How talk creates context**

I have shown Julie switching frames quite dramatically between the classroom and the toilets; there are also examples in the data where children switch rapidly between frames at a more micro-level in the course of conversation in order to re-accent (in Volosinov's terms) a previous utterance, or to rekey (Goffman 1981) their own position within an interaction (or both). In this sense speakers use talk to create a new context within which they intend their words (and possibly other people's previous words) to be (re)interpreted. Lindstrom (1992) points out that speakers may evoke a new context directly, or use a particular linguistic feature to cue or rekey it, in

order to position themselves more powerfully within an encounter<sup>11</sup>. I want to look now at examples from the data which show children managing or attempting to construct, negotiate and shift the conversational frames of knowledge and meaning which give them particular positions and power within an interaction. I shall suggest that children sometimes create ambiguity through holding two frames simultaneously in order to keep their options open.

The next extract illustrates how children rekey an exchange so that particular meanings can be challenged or changed within the space of a few seconds. Julie's class were drawing a picture as part of follow-up work to their teacher's reading from 'The Silver Sword', and the exchange below occurred shortly after the teacher announced that pupils would be getting their school reports to take home at the end of the week. Mr. Clayson is the head teacher at Camdean.

Pupil 1     Since I started at this school I've only been to see Mr. Clayson once.

Pupil 2     Neither have I.

Julie        (*gasps*) I've been there about ten times, always going to Clayson every single day. Whack whack whack because she's been a good girl! I normally go there because I say I've been involved, when I'm not. I stick up for my other friends.

Pupil 3     I know, you're trying to get your nose in and things

Julie        I'm not, I'm sticking up for my friends and I say that I was doing it as well.

I would suggest that there are three different frames invoked here in rapid succession, within which individual utterances can be

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<sup>11</sup> Walkerdine's account (1981) of a girl at nursery changing a game of nurses and doctors to one of mummies and children to reposition herself more powerfully shows how children as young as four years old can do this with alacrity.



contextualised and interpreted. At the opening of the conversation the frame is an assumed shared understanding about the significance of being sent to the head teacher: it is a fairly awesome punishment meted out for particularly naughty behaviour. Julie however subverts this frame and rekeys her own position as someone who has been sent to the head teacher (so she claims) on many occasions. She jokes that she goes to the head's office every day, caricatures what happens to her there (corporal punishment was not used in the school), and inverts the normal relationship between behaviour and punishment<sup>12</sup>. As is the case with Bakhtin's notion of genre and Foucault's of discourse, at a more local level these different frames are associated with different ways of interpreting experience and making value judgements. The original frame invokes school institutional notions of right and wrong, good and bad behaviour and rewards and punishments. Julie however introduces a new frame within which loyalty to one's friends should take precedence over honesty, as defined in school terms, so that she can claim that in her case punishment constitutes a martyrdom to friendship rather than a just response to bad behaviour. Thus Julie is positioned as a feisty individualist whose integrity in personal relationships is not to be undermined by school norms. This frame is however itself contested by a third pupil, who claims that Julie's actions should not be interpreted as loyalty, but as nosiness. The comment 'You're trying to get your nose in' retrospectively rekeys the meaning of Julie's previous comment. As Lindstrom (op cit) points out, this kind of rapid reframing not only transgresses Gricean conversational maxims of cooperation, but also raises questions about Grice's location of meaning

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<sup>12</sup> see Chukovsky (1963) on the role of younger children's playful use of nonsense and humorous reversals in conceptualising 'reality'.

within an independent speaker's intentions (see also Stubbs 1983). I shall revisit these issues in more detail in Chapter Six.

In relation to the example above, the issue of Julie's motives is never resolved and, as in many other conversations, a number of alternative possible meanings are carried forwards, any one of which may be drawn on in future dialogues. Ambiguity of meaning is also apparent in the next piece of transcript, where Julie and David (10 years) are sitting together eating their sandwiches at lunch time. I would suggest that the way Julie sets up and manages this ambiguity is an intrinsic part of her accomplishment of particular conversational purposes.

Julie Do you know where I live? Right if you go along Redlea the only blue door, that's where I live. The only blue door in Redlea.

David Only?

Julie Right, if you can't get through, go to my next door neighbour's, that side (...), go through her place, jump over the fence and go down my path.

David Which number do you bang on?

Julie One three four. And if you can't get through, go to, go round to number one three two, go through the fence, over the wood (....)

David [ you got a bike?

Julie Puncture (.....) got lost. I got skates. I can hold onto the back of your bike and go ooooooh! (pause) Do you really go out with thingy (pause) Ma-

David Who?

Julie Mellie

David No

Julie What, did she chuck you? Why? (pause) Do you think Warren will mind if I move onto your table?

David No. It's my table, I was the first one on it, so I own it.

Julie You don't, the school does. What's the hottest part of the sun? What's the hottest part of the sun? (pause) Page three!

Julie is simultaneously juggling two contextual frames here: the conversation starts with the 'children knocking on doors and playing after school' frame, but Julie's question about whether David is going out with Mellie retrospectively adds a different kind of meaning to her previous invitation. and sets up the 'would you like to be my boyfriend?' frame. Julie's response to David's stated ownership of the classroom table also provides mixed messages. On the one hand she quickly contradicts his assumption of dominance, 'you don't, the school does', but she follows this up immediately with a joke 'what's the hottest part of the sun?' which invokes a dominant male perspective, relying for its humour on a pun between the sun and the Sun newspaper, with its regular Page 3 photograph of a naked female model.

In one sense Julie is using language as a resource, drawing on both childhood and teenage discourses to negotiate her relationship with David, whose response will to some extent determine which meanings are carried forwards. But these discourses are also themselves shaping the choices of meanings available. The words 'go out with', 'chuck' and 'hot' all have specific cultural connotations, and invoke particular kinds of gender relations, and Julie's use of these involves her taking up particular positions and values. However, the ambiguity and provisionality of her approach allows her to try out and test these positions and values while retaining the face-saving option of the alternative conversational frame, should David reject her advances. While ambiguity and provisionality can lead to confusion, they can also offer a much more active and creative role to the listener than in the traditional conduit model of communication, and allow the speaker to take risks in trying out particular relationships and identities, without the face loss which more committed language acts might



entail. (See also Bloome 1993 on the positive role of indeterminacy as a linguistic resource for making meaning and taking action).

In this last example Julie successfully manoeuvres between two potential interpretative frames. It was not always the case, however, that children could simultaneously manage two different frames so skilfully. The final example I use in this section comes from a school assembly in Lakeside. Once a week assembly was led by a particular class, who usually displayed work and sometimes performed music and drama. On one particular morning, after three nine year-olds standing in front of the rows of children seated on the floor had read out poems they had written about animals (these children's voices were completely inaudible) another boy from their class asked the teachers to come and sit on two rows of chairs placed diagonally at the front of the hall. Apparently reluctantly, with a few exaggerated 'Oh no's', the teachers went and sat on the chairs in front of the boy 'teacher', and proceeded to act out the parts of naughty children, pretending to punch each other, pull each others' hair and tip chairs up. The child 'teacher' initially looked rather embarrassed and unsure how to react, while some children among the classes sitting on the floor laughed and make the occasional comment. The nine year old 'teacher' then pretended to try to restore order to his 'class', managing very skilfully as far as I could see to communicate both the respect due to teachers, and also his dramatic role of a teacher trying to control naughty pupils. He did this through clearly marking his role as fictitious by using exaggerated body movements, but being ultimately fairly ineffective (he did not, for instance, try to physically stop the free for all 'fight' which was developing between a couple of members of staff). If the child teacher was quite remarkable in his simultaneous management of two frames which gave him quite opposing role

positions, however, the children seated watching on the floor were not so adept. As the teacher 'pupils' at the front became more unruly, some of the seated children began to imitate them fairly freely, and several scuffles broke out as the noise level rose. The teacher whose class was taking the assembly now quickly stepped out of the role of naughty pupil, and gave the watching children a threatening look as he loudly said 'shh'. Some children echoed this 'shh', and the hall quickly fell silent, the pupils seeming somewhat relieved that normal power relations had been resumed. The teachers at the front stopped messing about and their 'teacher' read them versions of Jack and the Beanstalk, Goldilocks and the Three Little Pigs which had been written by the nine year-olds for younger children. There was still some intermittent whispering among the other classes watching and at one point the head teacher interrupted the story reading of the pretend teacher to order a child out of the assembly to go and wait by his office.

I got the impression that pupils were not familiar with this kind of role reversal sketch, and were in fact quite confused by the simultaneous holding of two different frames which was required. There were two references back to this event afterwards on the tapes, which illustrate the differences of level at which the sketch was read by pupils and teachers. Going up the stairs from assembly to the classroom Darren (12 years) showed his appreciation and literal reading of the teachers' carnivalesque behaviour by re-enacting their squabbling, with Martie (11 years):

Darren    You know when all the teachers were messing about,  
              pulling each others' hair and punching each other?

Martie    Yes

Darren    Look like this, and like this

Martie And he was going (....).

Later in the day as children milled around rather noisily getting ready for lunch, however, Mrs. K made a comment which demonstrates the more metaphoric level at which she herself interpreted the sketch: 'And you wonder where we got our ideas from in this morning's assembly. Think about it.' The children's response to this was fairly blank, and I would suggest that there is no evidence that they saw the teachers' behaviour in the sketch as any kind of comment on their own. One of the meta messages of the teachers' performance ('this is how your behaviour seems to us') may well have been lost on the majority of pupils.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

I have shown how children's language practices are sensitive to various different aspects of context. Physical surroundings may be signalled through deixis, which may also set up intertextual links with other contexts. Language use makes implicit assumptions about the nature of the social setting, relevant cultural values, and the relationship and shared history between the participants (compare Julie's use of language in Miss P's dressing down of the class, with her conversation with Carol and Nicole in the toilets). Language practices reflect the generic potential of specific social settings (from playing in a child's bedroom to tidying up the classroom to chatting in the school cloakroom), and encode particular relationships, subject positions and silences. I have also shown how in the course of a language event, the talk itself creates a discursive context, and that there can be rapid cueing or rekeying of new frames, with children sometimes holding a number of frames simultaneously, in order to create ambiguity and



retain the potential for the alternative speaker positions and goals invoked within the different discourses.

What implications does all this have then for the concept of context in relation to a particular utterance? Goodwin and Duranti (1992) suggest that it is useful to see contextualisation in terms of a focal event, and the frame or field of action within which it is embedded, while acknowledging that this embedding is a 'socially constituted, interactively sustained, time-bound phenomenon' (op cit p6). While I found it important to consider the physical, social and cultural aspects of context discussed above, I would argue that the role of the discursive context and intertextual references, in constituting meaning, make the relationship between text and context rather more complex than the 'figure/ground' model put forwards by Goodwin and Duranti would suggest. The various contexts created by the conversations I recorded, including the different generic and discursive forms and the intertextual links invoked by words and phrases, mean that there are often a number of possible contextual frameworks within which to interpret an utterance. In fact an intertextual link itself may also be the central point of an utterance meaning, as in Mrs. K's remark 'And you wonder where we got our ideas from'; in this sense the 'ground' can also simultaneously be part of the 'figure'. I shall be exploring the interrelationships between potential 'figures' and multiple 'grounds' further, in the next chapter, where I examine how the use of reported speech introduces a new context, and sets up complex dialogic relations between the reported and reporting frame.

## Chapter Five: Reproducing voices

### 5.1 Introduction

The data I collected is full of reported voices. Children use them to invoke particular people, scenarios, relationships and evaluative viewpoints. In addition to reporting other people's and their own voices from previous occasions, with varying degrees of directness, children also sometimes take on another person's voice more or less completely, reproducing it as if it were their own. I shall look in more detail in Chapter Seven at the children's use of reported speech in their spontaneous oral narratives, but in this chapter I want to more broadly review the various ways in which the children invoke voices, throughout the data. I shall be looking in particular at how different forms of reported and appropriated speech relate to different speaker purposes, and to varying degrees of mitigation and commitment. I shall also discuss how the dialogic relationship between the speaker and the reported voice contributes to the ongoing construction of meaning.

### 5.2 You are what you say

When children wanted to talk about somebody's personality, they often did this through invoking something the person had said. In the examples below, direct reported speech is used by Julie in Camdean to illustrate Miss P's sense of humour, and by Jenny (11 years) in Lakeside who is talking about Mr. Sinclair's apparent strictness. Both of these examples come from talk in the classroom. In the third

example, from her interview with me, Kim (11 years) in Lakeside uses indirect speech (underlined) to exemplify Mrs. K's 'nastiness' towards herself.

1.

Julie D'you remember that time when we had to make words out of thingy and I said 'cod' and she said (*measured tone*) 'You cod be right!'

Kirsty (*laugh*) Yes

Julie She, she might be a bit strict but

Kirsty /She is funny

Julie Yes I know, she goes (*posh voice*) 'Oh I'm beautiful!'

2.

Jenny That Mr. Sinclair seems as though he's really, you know, nasty and strict, but he ain't. He's soft,

Tracy Cause Miss would tell us off if we was doing our hair, wouldn't she?

Jenny You see the way he's standing there? He never shouted at those boys like he does in assembly 'If you can't pray quietly then don't pray at all!'

Tracy Yea

3.

Kim She can be really, she's nasty to me, she don't like me at all. {She thinks

Michelle {She can be really nasty

Kim She says that I always go me own way and I never go by the rules like I always go that door over there, it's only for visitors

Strictness, softness and nastiness were seen by the children as significant teacher attributes. Strictness in teachers was respected, but teachers who often got cross with pupils were 'nasty'. The ideal teacher in the children's eyes was one who had good control of the class, but who was also fair, pleasant and kind to individuals; some



children still talked fondly of a former teacher they had had in the school, who fitted this description. Humour in teachers was also highly valued, but not sarcasm addressed against an individual child, which was 'nasty'<sup>13</sup>.

It is perhaps not surprising that teachers are characterised through their reported speech, since they present themselves to children as people largely through the way they talk and manage the talk of others, within the classroom. But other people are also characterised by reported dialogue. Michelle, referring to her father's stepson in her interview, says 'The boy, he's ugly, but he's got a nice personality. He's seven and he's nice to me, he goes "Do you want to watch telly? Watch whatever you want!". He's so nice'. And Darren (12 years) illustrates his mother's tendency to exaggeration, (and her criticism of this trait in himself), through reported dialogue. He is talking with friends in the school coach on the way to their swimming lesson:

Martin That drop? See that little hill? It's like that! (*holds hand to show steepness*)

Darren It's not like that, it's like that (*holds hand at less acute angle*)

Martin Oh yes, I'm exaggerating

Darren My mum always does that. She pretends, she hits her head or something, and then she goes to somebody 'I whacked my head and all blood was coming out!' (*laughter*), sitting there going 'Oh, oh!' and I, if I say something like 'Oh a thousand pounds', she goes 'Don't exaggerate, Darren!'; I go 'What? I'm not!'.

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<sup>13</sup> cf Gannaway 1984, who found that pupils' 'ideal teacher' combined firm discipline with being able to 'have a laugh', and did not pick on individuals.

In addition to describing people's personality traits through what they say, each of these examples also depicts a particular kind of evaluative attitude towards the person being described. Julie and Kirsty are demonstrating a kind of fond respect for Miss P., while Jenny and Tracy don't think much of Mr. Sinclair's softness in their classroom. Kim and Michelle feel Mrs. K is unjustly nasty with them, but Michelle obviously likes her father's stepson ('He's so nice'), and Darren conveys an exasperated amusement at his mother's inconsistency over their shared tendency to exaggerate. The speaker's evaluative attitude comes through in the words and tone of the reported voice, and in the way it is contextualised within an exchange, depending on speakers' current conversational purposes

While my data illustrates Volosinov's 'linear' and 'pictorial' types of reporting, it also shows that there are more subtle gradations within these categories. Reported speech involves repeating or (usually) rephrasing another's words, but the manner in which these words are reproduced and framed also conveys the speaker's evaluative attitude towards them (Volosinov 1973). There is a kind of dialogue set up between the voice of the speaker, and the voice they are reporting. This dialogue may itself be the focus of the meaning which a speaker is intending to convey; for instance it is the difference between how Mrs. K. characterises Kim and how she feels herself to be, which is the point she wants to get across by reporting what her teacher said. Similarly, when Josie is talking in her interview with me about the difference between what her mother thinks of her, and her own sense of self, she says 'I've got a Barbie (*doll*) and if I've got problems, I talk to her. My mum says I'm a baby, but it's just the way I am'.

It is interesting that in both this example and in Kim's comment about Mrs. K's nastiness, where the girls want to clearly indicate some

distance between their own evaluative viewpoints and those of the person they are reporting, Josie and Kim both use indirect rather than direct speech. I would suggest that if either of them had reported the voice as direct speech, they would have needed to use an excessive amount of prosodic or paralinguistic framing to indicate their opposition to its content; using indirect reporting is more economical, in conveying the message they intend.

### 5.3 Invoking and reconstructing social experience

I have shown above how children use reported speech to characterise a person, and an aspect of their relationship with them. Reported speech is also used to invoke a specific social event, and to 'accent' it in a particular way. In the next example Nicole and Melissa (both 10 years) are teasing Kieran (also 10) as they finish off their mathematics work. Nicole uses reported speech to invoke a shared experience with Melissa, which excludes Kieran, and which she uses to taunt him. The Warehouse is a youth club on the local estate.

Kieran    (*Melissa is flicking Kieran's hair with her pencil*) Stop that, or I'll punch you

Melissa    Oh yea then, come on then, come on then

Kieran    No I'm not going to waste my time

Melissa    Do you remember the first day you come to school and you was crying because your mum was going to leave you? Yea?

Nicole    Yea and do you remember I was frightened down the Warehouse?

Melissa    No

Nicole    The first day you brought me over and I, you goes 'Yea I could beat you up and all these kids as well'. But I never cried

Kieran    I never cried



Melissa Yes you do, you were hiding behind the table

Kieran That's a lie

Melissa That was you!

Kieran Was it hell

Nicole (*imitating a teacher's voice*) Kieran, will you sit down and get down to your work.

Where are we now. Miss, can you help me?

Nicole here uses a single item of reported speech, and her response ('but I never cried') to recall for herself and Melissa a more extensive event. Like Kieran's first day at school, this is another 'first day' for her, but a more frightening one (she seems to suggest) because it is at the local youth club full of tough kids and Melissa, the very person to whom Nicole might have turned for protection, threatens her. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Miller et al (1992) show how children often describe their own attributes through a contrast with another child's behaviour, and here Nicole is simultaneously presenting herself as a brave person, and taunting Kieran for his cowardliness, as she constructs it. This however is teasing rather than a serious argument, and when Kieran starts getting really rattled, Nicole defuses the situation by taking on a teacher's voice (signalled prosodically) to break the conversational frame, and refocus the children on their mathematics work: 'Kieran, will you sit down and get down to your work'. This 'teacher's voice' reframes the dialogue and rekeys the interaction (though still interestingly positions Nicole as superior to Kieran); whether Kieran accepts the joke or is inhibited by Mrs. K's approach is unclear, but in any case he does not respond.

Here is a more extensive description of a social event, related through dialogue. Karen (11 years) is explaining to me in her interview about how she first met her boyfriend:

Janet And how did you get to know him, then?

Karen Swimming, we went swimming at the leisure centre, me and Helen

Helen And I said I'd walked from Scotland

Karen Because he started talking to us and she stood still and I stood still and didn't move and he goes 'Do you two ever move?' and she goes 'Well we've just walked all the way from Scotland to get down here, so we've got to walk all the way back, now'. He goes 'God, why, don't you like swimming up there? Oh yeh, the water's dirty, isn't it, so you come down here'.

Helen He's a right prat.

Karen uses reported dialogue to convey the tenor (Halliday) and key (Hymes) of the interaction in the swimming pool; this kind of humorous banter characterised a lot of cross-gender interactions in the talk I recorded, and according to the children's reports, would often be used by both boys and girls to initiate a new social contact with a member of the opposite sex. It has been suggested that people use humour to deal with areas of social ambiguity or taboo (Douglas 1966), and humour seems to be useful in potential boyfriend/girlfriend overtures for a number of reasons. In addition to providing a kind of showcase for displays of wit and repartee to catch and engage the attention of the desired other, it creates a safe distance and a potential protection of 'face' (Goffman 1967). If the other person is not interested in pursuing the relationship, the initiator can always rekey the interaction (Goffman 1981), and claim they were just joking around (cf Bauman 1992 on 'disclaimers of performance'). Here, Helen's final comment 'he's a right prat' may reflect the fact that although it was she who responded to the boy's initial invitation to a joking exchange, it was Karen who became his girlfriend.

As I pointed out earlier, when the children recall an experience using reported dialogue, they do not of course necessarily repeat the exact words which were used on the previous occasion. Reported speech is reproduced to fulfil a speaker's current conversational goals. Thus we might expect that Karen may have picked out the wittiest part of the exchange with the boy at the swimming pool, and Nicole may have made Melissa sound rather more threatening at the Warehouse than she actually was. On a number of occasions in the data I have recordings both of a dialogue between children, and of how that dialogue is then reported by one of them to others who had not been directly involved. The next extract shows how Julie reconstructs her dialogue with David to some friends standing nearby, as the children wait in the classroom after the lunch break for afternoon registration. In particular, she gives David a much more active, responsive role in the reconstructed dialogue than he had in the original exchange. During the dinner-break, Julie had been playing a pick pocketing game with some friends. The transcript below starts with Julie's direct interaction with David (line 1). During her second turn, she reports this interaction to friends standing nearby (lines 8-10). At the end of this turn she engages David directly again (line 10), and after asking him if he is 'going out' with Shelly, gets him to act out being pick pocketed again. At the end of her last turn, she again reports this second interaction to her friends (lines 18-20).

- 1 Julie David, can I pickpocket you? (*giggles*) Right, I'm going to muddle you a minute. Go like that (*turns him round*).  
 Right, now you do that (*puts his arms out, giggles*) Right  
 and then I go to your side like that, and I stand there for  
 5 about a minute or two.
- David How is this muddling me?



- Julie No, I'll just pickpocket you (*laughs*) Leave it, leave it,  
leave it (*turns to friends*). Right, I says to David, I says  
'Stand there, I'm going to muddle there' and I says 'You  
10 put your arms out like that'. (*turns back to David*) David.  
David Yea  
Julie Are you going out with Shelly?  
David No  
Julie Alright, do that a minute, I want to try something. Right,  
15 do that. Put your arms up. Right you look straight to the  
side. Then I come to your side and then I stay there for a  
little minute or two- I pick pocketed you! (*turns to  
friends*) He said, he said last time, he said 'I'll murder  
you!' and I put his arms out like that and I said 'I've just  
20 pick pocketed you!' and he goes 'What?'

I would suggest that, as in the exchange about playing together after school, we can again see Julie simultaneously managing two potential interpretative frames for her exchange with David. Her use of reported dialogue to give a sort of running commentary on her 'pick pocketing' of him, is an important part of her orchestration of their interaction so that it can be interpreted either as a child's game, or as a flirtation. The physical contact involved in preparing David for the game is accompanied by giggling, and the question 'Are you going out with Shelly?'. Similarly, Julie's reporting of the interaction could function both to demonstrate her prowess in the pick pocketing game, and to publicly state an interest in David as a potential boyfriend. Her creation of his fictive responses ('I'll murder you!' and 'What!') are more appropriate for both these purposes than his actual rather bemused 'How is this muddling me?'. She not only changes his words, but also frames them within an account of a much more slick pick pocketing operation than the one accompanied by extensive dialogue and instructions from herself, which had happened only a few seconds before.

In addition to being used to report specific events, the evocative power of reported dialogue is such that it can be used to refer to a broader category of events. The connotations which a reported voice brings with it, of a particular social scenario, relationships and evaluative viewpoints, can be used to refer to a recognisable category of social experience. Often this invoked category is then used to contextualise a specific incident. It is as if the speaker starts by saying 'This is the kind of thing I'm going to tell you about'; and they may in fact assume that their audience will recognise the genre of dialogue, invoked by quite minimal dialogic cues. Terry (11 years), described to me in his interview how a neighbourhood fight had started outside his house the previous night. He explained 'They come round and started f'ing and blinding and all that lot'. 'All that lot' refers to an exchange of insults and profanities which Terry expects he can leave to my imagination (and would probably feel uncomfortable repeating more explicitly in my presence). This brief indication of a particular kind of dialogue exchange is enough to invoke similar situations from my own experience, so I can imagine the kind of hostile, aggressive, provocative verbal behaviour Terry witnessed, which quickly escalated into physical violence. And describing a rather different kind of social interaction, Julie, explaining how she learnt to swap things when she first came to Camdean, similarly uses a generalised description of a dialogue to invoke a generic swapping transaction:

Julie      'You swap that for what' an and they go 'nayee' or whatever. They go 'great' and get it out, and go 'Oh dear- forgot this' and I say 'I'll give it to you tomorrow, and I'll give you this stuff now and you give me that and I'll give you whatever tomorrow'. So they go 'uh'.

The use of dialogue in these two examples may be implicit and perfunctory, but is perfectly appropriate at the particular point in the conversation at which it occurs. I know from Julie's dialogue that swapping involves agreement by both parties to exchange items, and that one transaction may be split over a number of days (she went on to talk at more length about her own initial naiveté, and subsequent recognition of different kinds of value). And in the earlier example above, Terry conveys clearly to me as much as I need to know about the beginning of the fight (he goes on to describe its course and different stages, and the underlying reasons for it, at more length).

Thus children's use of reported dialogue can invoke and stand in for a category of social experience (a street fight, swapping), either, in the Terry's case, as a frame for a specific event, or, in Julie's explanation, as a way of highlighting the shared characteristics of a class of events.

An important part of reporting social experience is the conveying of the speakers' feelings. Sometimes children used reported speech to focus directly on thoughts and feelings. The next examples come from the interviews:

a.

Terry: Sometimes when I go home dinners and my mum's always out, and I feel like just going 'Right, I'm leaving!'

b.

Karlie: I was all dressed up in this lovely feathered suit and my hair like this and I come walking into this great big hall where, and there was millions and absolute millions of people in there and this thing was only a little round small thing and we thought 'Oh God, how you going to dance on that?', really panicking...

Here, the reported voice (underlined) conveys an inner state, which is intimately related to an external event. There is a strong evaluative



component, and a sense of a particular kind of relationship between the speaker, and another person or set of circumstances. The audience of the reported voice is complex; it is partly the speakers themselves (they are talking to themselves in the reported speech), partly by implication other people (Terry's mother, and the other members of Karlie's dance troupe, indicated by her use of 'we', and possibly the ambiguous 'you'), partly myself, and partly the friend sitting with them in the interview. In one sense children's talk to others is always also talk to themselves; they hear and react to themselves responding in particular ways. As I discussed in Chapter Two, both Volosinov and Bakhtin, like Vygotsky, suggest that conversations are internalised to become inner dialogues. Thus individual thought processes also involve the taking on of voices which provide responses to voices heard in previous conversations, and which call up particular relationships and contexts. This is illustrated particularly clearly in the next extract, again from the interview with Karlie and Nicole. Karlie (12 years) has explained that she sometimes goes to visit her father in prison, and I asked her what it was like doing that. Karlie answers me by representing her feelings at the prison as a kind of inner dialogue, which involves invoking her own voice as if she were talking first to herself, and then to her dad:

Karlie It's like - it's just loads and loads of bars. So you think 'What's my dad doing in here, he didn't do nothing' because he got accused by chopping someone's hand off so- and it weren't true,- and you get in there, and you're seeing him, and you think 'Come with us, come with us, you can't stay in here cause it's not true really, is it?' so you think 'You can come with us now, you can get out', but it's just not true.

When I was trying to punctuate this transcribed talk with speech marks it was difficult to make out where one voice ends and another starts, or to identify particular audiences. As in the examples where Terry and Karlie were expressing their feelings through reported speech, earlier above, it is not a question here of addressees, overhearers and eavesdroppers (Goffman 1974), but the ambiguity of addressee, which is central to the meaning and function of what Karlie is saying. Sometimes she seems to be addressing herself, sometimes her father, sometimes myself and sometimes previous voices she has heard. It is difficult to know, for example, to whom her final 'it's just not true' is addressed, and whether it refers to the crime of which her father is accused or to the possibility of taking him home with her, or to both. The fragmented nature of the dialogues invoked in Karlie's response to my question would suggest that her talk here is close to what Vygotsky calls 'inner speech', where dialogues we have had and those which we might have with other people feed into our internal thought processes. This utterance then has its own internal business: Karlie is struggling to come to terms with her father's imprisonment, and positioning herself in relation to the differing accounts of his guilt which she has heard people give. She is also, at the level of my interview conversation with her, constructing the voices in the representation of her inner dialogue in order to convey a particular presentation of herself to me and to Nicole.

#### 5.4 Appropriating voices

At the beginning of this chapter, I referred to Bakhtin and Volosinov's description of how, in addition to reporting other people's speech, we sometimes take a voice on directly, reproducing it as if it were our own. I shall now look at examples of this kind of appropriation in the

data, and show that, as Bakhtin/Volosinov argue, taking on a voice also always involves taking on an evaluative viewpoint. I shall suggest that where a child does not want to express full commitment to this perspective, they use grammatical devices and prosodic framing (ie pitch, loudness, intonation) which place the voice somewhere between full scale appropriation, and reported speech.

As my data was collected in school, it is perhaps not surprising that one of the voices most commonly echoed in children's speech was the teacher's. Whichever child I fixed the radio mike to, the teacher's voice was omnipresent in the recordings during class time. She was there addressing the whole class at the beginning of each session, giving school notices, issuing general reprimands and setting the children to work. Then, as more local talk between children takes over on the tape, the teacher can still be heard in the background as she moves around the class working with individuals, her voice rising periodically above the hubbub to issue instructions, or to complain about the noise.

In addition to the physical presence of the teacher's voice on the tapes, it can also be heard within the children's voices, not just in reported speech like the examples I discussed earlier, but also absorbed more directly into the child's own voice. One of the most obvious examples of this is where a child repeats all or part of an instruction. For instance, Mr Sinclair announced before reading the short story 'LBW' to the assembled school: 'You've got to concentrate a bit more than usual'. The boys sitting next to Gary (11 years) were fidgeting and he whispered fiercely: 'Shh, we've got to concentrate!'. And in the French class when Martie said to Gary 'Got to get this right, Gary', Gary replied using the words which their teacher had earlier addressed to himself: 'You don't have to get it exactly, just do your



best'. The teacher's voice may also be slightly rephrased. For example, when Linda (10 years) asked Mrs. K. 'What do I have to do?' and she answered 'Copy it out nice and neat', Linda immediately turned to Kieran and told him: 'Kieran, if you've drawn your thing in your book, you're allowed to copy it out'.

Children not only reproduced the voices of their teachers, but also quoted or rephrased the 'voice' of a textbook or worksheet. Tracy and Jodie are 11.

Tracy (reading) 'Find Scout Hall again. It is in the grid square B two. What shape shows it on the map?'

Jodie That it? No, no.

Tracy What shape? You've got to name the shape.

Although 'You've got to name the shape' is Tracy's rephrasing, I would argue she is still taking on the voice of the worksheet because, like Gary and Linda, she is expressing full commitment to an instruction, and also because she acknowledges it as such through the modal phrase 'got to'. Modal forms like 'got to', 'want to' express the speaker's attitudes, towards themselves, listeners or subject matter (Fowler and Kress 1979 p200). Children often used modal phrases like 'have to', and 'allowed to' when discussing classroom work procedures or behaviour, thus simultaneously expressing commitment to school rules and regulations, and also their own lack of choice in complying with them.

In addition to reproducing whole phrases, children may just re-use a key term, to invoke the relevant human or textual voice and its authority. In the next example, Julie, Kirsty and Sharon are recording and mounting the objects they have collected during the scavenging hunt in the school grounds. A short time previously, they had looked

at a library book on snails, and read that snails have four tentacles, 'to touch, feel and smell'. Kirsty and Julie are now having an argument about whether the snail they have collected should be somehow 'mounted' on the card (Kirsty) or drawn (which Julie has already started to do). Kirsty finally turns to Julie's drawing and scornfully dismisses it, using the term 'tentacles' to refer back to the authority of the library book:

Kirsty Is that meant to be a snail?

Julie Yea

Kirsty I can't see its tentacles

Another classroom context in which children can be seen taking on the voice of the teacher is on the occasions when teachers are addressing a group of pupils, either about work or behaviour, in a kind of simulated dialogue which offers children limited and heavily cued turns. Speaking at all within this strongly teacher-controlled frame is an expression of commitment to her institutional authority, and to the ways of talking about knowledge and processes which she is modelling. Children are not so much speaking for themselves, as filling in the gaps left by her voice, as in the next extract from Julie's mathematics class where the teacher is explaining to the whole class how to lay out and add up restaurant bills:

Miss P. Now twenty three pence isn't a whole pound, so what number do we put in the pounds column?

Pupils None

Miss P. Nought. Notice I've left a big space. What am I going to put next?

Pupil Point } two

Pupil        { The decimal point

Miss P. The decimal point. We're not going to put the numbers,  
just the decimal point that separates the pounds, and  
then we put {two, three

Pupils {two, three

Miss P. Twenty three pence is point two three of a pound. So the  
plaice {costs one pound fifteen

Julie {one pound fifteen

This extract is typical of teaching sequences where a procedure or concept is being explained to a large group of pupils. Children supply suggestions for the slots left by the teacher, and she either chooses and repeats the one she is looking for (for example 'the decimal point' rather than 'point two'), or rephrases the suggestion to move it into the appropriate curricular discourse (for example 'none' is rephrased as 'nought'). The children chorus 'two, three' with Miss P., their voices merging with hers and by this time she has switched to using 'we' rather than 'I' in her demonstration. Finally, Julie anticipates what Miss P. is going to say next, and murmurs 'one pound fifteen' a fraction before her teacher. I would argue that one of the important ways in which children learn to speak and write the educational genres of mathematics, geography and so on is through appropriating the voices of their teachers from actual dialogues like the one above, and from verbally mediated interactions with written texts, like the library book extract about the snail's tentacles mentioned earlier. In Vygotskian terms, the taking on of the voice of a teacher, textbook or worksheet, represents a stage between the original dialogue, and the internalisation of educational dialogue which children may use to direct their future actions in the classroom.

Frequently, teacher's familiar phrases from previous occasions are used by children to fill in the slots in this kind of teacher discourse, in relation to classroom procedures and behaviour, as well as curricular



content. For example, at the beginning of my first week in the school, I heard Mrs. K. explain a number of times to the class that if the subject table where they wanted to work was full, then they should do something else (ie work in another curriculum area for that period of the day). In the first session on Wednesday morning Mrs K. was addressing the whole class:

Mrs K. Now, if the maths table is full, what should you do? I've marked you in Philip, thank you, I got a message. Oh, have you got a note as well? Thank you. So what should you do. Say that you wanted to do maths and you suddenly saw that the maths base was full. What should you do. Martie?

Martie Do something else

Mrs K. Do something else. And sit in a base that isn't full.

Similarly, in the earlier example on p130, when Miss P is reprimanding Julie's class about the untidiness of their room they reproduce the phrase 'not listening', which they have heard her use many times before. In these kind of examples children reproduce the teacher's voice as if it were their own. Teachers also invoke children's voices, but here there is a sharp contrast between occasions where a teacher takes up and repeats a child's phrase as a signal that the child has given the right answer (for example 'the decimal point' in the maths exchange), and where they distance it through framing, as when Miss P used a high whining voice to mimic a pupil voice in the exchange about tidying up, to convey a particular dialogic relationship between the speaker's, and the quoted voice.

As I have shown above, taking on a voice without any reporting clause or other kind of framing device signals a considerable amount of authorial commitment to both the propositional content and the

institutional authority of the reported speech, or text. Where children want to distance themselves from something a teacher has said, like Kim and Josie in the examples on pages 153 and 155, they use indirect reported speech. This makes the boundaries between the speaker's and the reported voice more clearly discernible, as when Melissa uses indirect reported speech in a complaint to Nicole that Mrs. K has given inconsistent instructions. She complains: 'First Miss tells us you've got to do a draft, right, then she tells us we've got to do it again on the same piece of paper'. Had the initial instruction not been contradicted, Melissa would probably have said 'you've got to do a draft', but because she is not clear, she distances herself from both instructions.

One of the problems with looking at children's direct reproduction of voices is that although one may have the sense that a child is repeating what someone else has said, for example a teacher or parent, it is often not possible to trace that 'voice' back to its original source. However, on occasion, children explicitly acknowledge the source of the voice they are taking on. For example, in their interview, Karlie encouraged Nicole to tell me the story of Nicole's sister's undetected pregnancy with the comment 'She did the best thing about it though, didn't she, Nicole?'. Nicole then tells the story (see Chapter Seven) and Karlie adds at the end: 'My dad said she did- Terri did the best thing about it' (ie didn't tell anyone that she was pregnant). Interestingly, although Karlie's evaluation which prompted the story was initially presented as her own, we now learn that it is in fact her father who originally made this judgement about Nicole's sister, Terri. First Karlie appears to have taken on her father's voice and presented his judgement of Terri's actions as her own, then she later acknowledges the source. For the children in my study, taking on

someone else's voice directly seems to imply a direct taking on, or trying out, of their evaluation of a situation, or action (Volosinov 1986). It signals an alignment with that person, who is often more authoritative; the speaker takes on their voice to give themselves greater power, for example in justifying their own position, or criticising others. This is the short term conversational purpose for invoking the voice, but the choice of a voice also has longer term implications; Bakhtin suggests that our taking on of voices and their attitudes is an important part of 'the ideological becoming of a human being' (1981 p341). Thus we see Karlie at this point appropriating her father's voice to take a particular step in her own moral development. And in Vygotskian terms, 'she did the right thing about it' indicates the internalisation of part of a dialogue Karlie had previously encountered, which is now used to express her own moral position.

In my interview with Karlie and Nicole, I understood Karlie's explicit acknowledgement that she was quoting her father as a way of adding weight to the view that Terri acted for the best. With different intonation and paralinguistic cues this acknowledgement could have been a mitigating move, offering Karlie the opportunity to distance herself slightly from her father's evaluation if she needed to. I would suggest in the next example that there is some element of retrospective distancing in Linda's subsequent acknowledgement of the voice she is quoting. Mr. Sinclair, who is standing in for Mrs. K., is moving round the classroom while the children are working, and asks Linda what the closely spaced contour lines on a map mean:

Linda It would tell you that there's hills

Mr S Shh right so

Linda { so you'd have to put your walking boots on



Mr S OK, so it's my walking boots

Linda That's what Miss said! (*laughter*)

Linda here may be acknowledging the source of her comment to make sure Mr Sinclair does not think it is cheeky; I would suggest that in reproducing Mrs K.'s witticism, she is also expressing loyalty to her own class teacher. Mr Sinclair, the deputy head, was not popular with the class, and although they often complained about Mrs K. to each other, the children represented her much more positively to people outside the class. For instance, when working in other classrooms where children were misbehaving, they would remark proudly 'Mrs. K. would never allow us to do that!' (and see comment in the transcript about Mr Sinclair's 'softness' earlier). So Linda's move here is double edged: it is a mitigation of possible disrespect towards Mr. Sinclair, but also a signal that her loyalty is not to him, but to Mrs. K.

In addition to distancing appropriated voices by retrospectively acknowledging their source, I have shown that voices invoked without a reporting clause can also be distanced by the use of prosodic devices, for example Miss P's imitation of a pupil's voice 'Where do I put my work?' and Nicole's imitation of a teacher's 'Kieran, will you sit down and get down to your work!'. Both these voices are parodies, and prosodic and paralinguistic framing (for example facial expression or other body language) are often used by children to indicate the relationship between the speaker's and the invoked voice in the creation of irony and parody. In the next example Darren uses flat intonation and an exaggeratedly bored facial expression to signal his ironic representation of Mrs. K.'s voice. She has asked for volunteers from the class to present their work in assembly the next week, and when Gary asks if he can explain about the computer program 'Logo',

Darren mutters a cynical parody of how he will be required to do this: 'Yea and you tell about how you define it, and then how you draw it and how you, how you write it and how you look at it and how how how you (..)' And in the next example Geoffrey (10 years) provides an ironic parody of his own voice in order to clarify a misunderstanding. Sarah (11 years) also ironically assumes the concerned voice of a naive mother who thinks her daughter's bruises have come from fighting. The conversation occurs while the children are queuing in the school corridor, waiting for the coach to arrive which will take them to the swimming pool. Darren (12 years) has just pretended to give Sherri (11 years), a love bite.

- Sherri:       *(laughing)* My mum thinks I've been in fights again!  
 Sarah:       What do your mum go? 'Who gave you a big bruise?'  
               *(laughter)*  
 Terry:       I'll give her a double bruise, aha!  
 Darren:       I gave her one on the arm  
 Geoffrey:    Oi, you could never give someone a love bite on the  
               arm, could you, could you? You can't!  
 Sherri:       You can, if you've got a T-shirt on.  
 Geoffrey:    Yea I mean, look, it's really exciting look, let's get  
               down to there, next time it'll be your finger! *(noise of*  
               *kissing).*

Both Sarah and Geoffrey frame their use of irony grammatically- 'What do your mum go?' and 'Yes, I mean, look..', but prosodic devices are also important here to convey the naiveté of the person whose voice they are using. Sarah pitches the mother's voice high, as if she were addressing a young child, and Geoffrey puts on an excited, enthusiastic voice to show just how ridiculous such enthusiasm would be. He is trying to explain here to Sherri that he was not asking whether it is physically possible to bite an arm, but whether it is

culturally appropriate, and we are aware of Geoffrey's authorial voice behind his assumed voice, mocking his own exaggerated parody.

Darren, Sarah and Geoffrey are not just creating a particular kind of voice for dramatic effect, but also to signal their own distance from and attitude towards the propositional content of the reported speech. Darren is expressing a lack of commitment to school literacy practices, Sarah is contrasting her own more sophisticated knowledge to Sherri's mother's naiveté, and Geoffrey is trying to clarify what he didn't mean by his question. In each case, we hear two voices simultaneously (Bakhtin's double-voiced discourse), the reported voice, and the speaker proclaiming their distance from it.

## 5.5 Conclusion

I have shown how children's use of reported speech to invoke a person also encodes a particular evaluative attitude towards them. Reported speech is used to reconstruct and 'accent' personal experience, to describe the affectual aspects of experience through representing feelings as inner dialogue, and to invoke recognisable categories of experience. Children use various grammatical devices and prosodic framing to express varying degrees of authorial commitment. In addition to explicitly reporting speech, children may also appropriate the voices of others more directly, reproducing them as if they were their own. These voices may be retrospectively framed, for example Karlie's father's comment on Terri's pregnancy and Linda's use of Mrs. T's comment about the walking boots. In Vygotskian terms, I have suggested that the appropriation of adults' voices in this way may be an important aspect of educational and moral development.



Commitment is expressed through speaker/reported voice alignment in terms of both structure and content, and distance can be manipulated through the use of direct or indirect speech, or prosodically, and is used for a variety of purposes in relation to meaning. Invoked dialogue brings with it contextual connotations of situations, relationships and evaluative perspectives, thus introducing a new frame into the current interaction. This double framed aspect of discourse containing reported speech not only problematises the notion of who is speaking, but also the notion of audience, which cannot be simply divided into Goffman's addressee, overhearer and eavesdropper. For instance I have discussed the complexity of audience in relation to Karlie's account of her prison visit. There is another kind of ambiguity when Julie replays her pick pocketing interaction with David to her friends: is it her intention that he should overhear the reconstructed dialogue, or is it in fact partly addressed to him?

There remain a number of ways of taking on other people's voices which I have not dealt with in this chapter. Occasionally, when narrating an account, the child author's voice is coloured by the voice of someone she is talking about. This kind of hybrid voice has been termed quasi-direct speech (Bakhtin 1981) or free indirect discourse (Toolin 1988), and will be discussed in relation to narrative in Chapter Seven. In addition, in a rather different way, children often took on words or phrases from each other, and sometimes completed teacher utterances, in the context of informal collaborative talk. I shall turn to that now, in the next chapter.

## Chapter Six: Collaboration in talk

### 6.1 Introduction

In terms of the theoretical framework I have discussed in Chapter Two, all talk is intrinsically collaborative. Volosinov shows that an utterance always constitutes a response, and that utterances simultaneously anticipate future responses within the very terms in which they are encoded and shaped. Thus they implicitly refer both to the past, and the future. In Bakhtin's later work he insists that even the most apparently monologic text is in fact dialogic in this sense. In addition, his point that our speech is always full of the voices of others suggests that talk is essentially a social, and not an individual text. In terms of the ethnography of communication literature, talk is always embedded in social practice, and conversation analysis and discursive psychology show how meaning is interactionally achieved through dialogue. In this section, I shall focus on the structures and strategies involved at a local level in accomplishing the informal collaborative talk which constitutes the main part of my data.

As Markova (1994) points out, most approaches to analysing dialogue (speech act theory, conversation analysis, Sinclair and Coulthard's discourse analysis) are based on attempts to split sections of text into smaller units. I would argue that this physical division of text is one important aspect of the way in which it encodes tenor and field (Halliday 1978), but would agree with Markova that while such approaches have increased understanding of the organisation, patterns and rules guiding the sequencing of dialogues, they are less

suitable for examining issues to do with the embeddedness of utterances within their linguistic and social contexts, or with speakers' perspectives and the dialogical interdependencies involved in the negotiation of meaning. Markova argues that in relation to these issues we need to subdivide dialogue into conceptual or epistemological rather than physical units. Utterances are often multifunctional and the collaborative negotiation of meaning cuts across physical divisions between turns, so that the dialogical quality of speech is not concentrated at the boundaries, but saturates the entire dialogue in the ways which Volosinov and Bakhtin describe. In other words, we need to look at the patterns of collaboration as they contribute to the ideational function of talk, as well as at how they are realised in the physical structures of turntaking. And, as dialogical interconnections have interpersonal as well as ideational functions, we can expect that the social functions of talk are also expressed in various complex ways across the dialogue.

I shall start by examining the division of speech between speakers (the turntaking), but show also how grammatical structures (for example clauses, narratives), can be collaboratively constructed between speakers, and how what Markova would call conceptual units are negotiated in recursive and iterative patterns, across longer stretches of speech. At the same time as the ideational functions of talk are being collaboratively accomplished, the interactional, or social functions are also being pursued. In my analysis of the examples below, I show how talk involves collaboration on physical (turntaking), grammatical, conceptual and social levels, and that there are interconnections between these. I shall not be looking at the relationship between children's talk around classroom tasks, and learning as defined in terms of school curriculum aims. There is



already a substantial literature on this (for example Barnes and Todd 1977, Phillips 1985, Bennett 1989, Fisher 1993), which uses theoretical frameworks and analytic methods appropriate to educational aims and values. With my rather broader interest in children's own values and purposes, I have taken examples for this chapter from children's talk in their interviews and from so-called 'off-task' classroom talk, as well as from more curriculum focused exchanges.

## 6.2 Friendship pairs: expanding a theme

A particularly common collaborative pattern in both my interview data, and also when children are offering explanations to teachers, is a series of linked utterances, sometimes overlapping or repeating each other, which expand on a particular theme. Here for instance are a number of examples from my interview with Kevin and Kieran (11 years), who frequently extended and elaborated each other's comments. They are talking in the first example about being in a gang, in the second about the cartoon stories Kevin designs at home, and in the third and fourth about having girlfriends:

a.

Janet And then what did the gang do?

Kieran Just went round

Kevin Play football

Kieran Telling jokes and

Kevin Tell jokes

b.

Janet What kind of stories?

Kevin Make up funny stories about characters

Kieran There's one of the boys has spiked hair

Kevin Has spiked hair, wears a T shirt

c.

Janet What happens if you want to stop being somebody's boyfriend?

Kieran Chuck 'em

Kevin Dump 'em

d.

Janet Have you had girlfriends before?

Kevin Yea, Lisa Smith, I've been out with her before, I went out with her for about a year when I was in year, when I was in second year

Kieran Yea, till third, weren't it?

Janet Why did you break up?

Kevin I don't know. Just got bored with each other

Kieran Go out with them too long you get bored

Kevin Yea

Kieran It's the same thing really, ain't it, you try to get someone different.

I was particularly struck in the interviews by the extent and detail of children's knowledge of each other's lives, which enabled them to collaborate in reporting their friend's, as well as their joint experiences. We can see a recurring pattern in the first three examples, where Kieran answers me, and Kevin provides an additional supportive elaboration. The pattern when they are working together in class, as I shall show in Chapter Eight, is also for Kieran to lead and Kevin to follow. In the fourth example however, where the focus is on Kevin's experience, we can see Kieran providing a supportive question (Yea, till third, weren't it?), and two further turns supporting his friends' comment about getting bored with girls. Kieran's repeated elaboration here about getting bored may be a move to defend his friend against possible criticism from myself (although I was not aware of expressing any). A number of times in the interviews I felt children were shaping what they said not just in response to how they

thought I might react to their words, but also in a response which predicted how I might react to the words of their friend. This kind of mutual warranting and supporting of each other's experience also occurred frequently in the interviews with Sam and Simon, and with Lee and Geoffrey. In each of these cases the boys are also close friends. Here is the same kind of process happening between two girls, who are talking about Karen's brother's accident (Karen is 11 and Helen 10):

Janet How long ago was that, then?

Karen That was

Helen /About three months

Karen About three months ago

Helen He was going boxing, he can't do that till next season, now

Karen He's just been getting on everybody's nerves

Helen He was going to get in a team or something, weren't he?

Karen Yea, just for the England boxing club, for the juniors but he can't do that now.

Although it is Karen's brother who is the subject of the conversation, Helen cuts in here to complete Karen's utterance (That was/About three months), and initially provides more detailed information than her friend (He was going boxing, he can't do that till next season, now). Karen may however be reclaiming the right to lead on this story with her comment 'He's just been getting on everybody's nerves'; although children often made derogatory remarks about their own family members, they avoided doing this about other children's relatives to their face, and it would have been very unusual for Helen to have the right to make this kind of comment here. Helen seems to acknowledge this move in her responding deferral to Karen 'He was going to get in a team or something, weren't he?', which in effect hands the story over to her friend. I would suggest that Helen, in displaying knowledge



about her friend's family life, is expressing her closeness with Karen both to her friend and to me, and that the delicate balance between supporting Karen and displaying this intimate knowledge to a third person whom she wants to impress is momentarily threatened, but skilfully repaired. The business of who has the right to tell what to whom is at the very heart of friendship (Shuman 1986, Hey 1988, Goodwin 1990) and in the interviews, where children revealed quite intimate details about their personal lives, friends would often provide leading supportive questions or comments which demonstrated their familiarity with the content of what was being said (thus supporting the 'truth' of the account), while being careful not to usurp the right to lead and to evaluate at that point in the conversation.

Where children were relating a shared experience, the pattern of the interaction served to elaborate and extend the account; it could also express, within its own structure, the relationship between the friends in the experience being related. Sam (10 years) and Simon (12 years), for instance, played extensively together out of school, and talked to me at length about the places between the railway line and the farmer's field where they built their camps, and the transformation of Simon's garden shed into a museum for their collection of animal bones. They explain how they found a man's rucksack along the canal:

Simon The other day about a month ago

Sam /Cause not a lot of people go over there

Simon /About a month ago, we found a rucksack and it was this man's, three pairs of trainers, a blanket, a toothbrush, a pair of pants and you know them things you relight, you refill your lighter with, and one of them

Sam [ Gas (....) so we sold it for fifty five p, it was full

Simon Yea and he kept the rucksack, he's still got it now

Sam He took the blankets for his shed

Simon Yea but I had to throw them away because they smelt a bit  
iffy and there was clothes

Sam I think I've still got the rucksack

Simon You have

The story is initially Simon's, but he responds to Sam breaking in with the additional information about the gas lighter not by competing to reclaim the floor, but by orientating his next remark to Sam's experience ('Yea and he kept the rucksack, he's still got it now'), whereupon Sam responds with a similar reference to Simon's ('He took the blankets for his shed') and the remaining turns are fairly evenly balanced. This pattern of interaction reflects the relaxed give and take which is characteristic of Simon and Sam's relationship; in the interview they often interrupt and overlap each other, and elaborate on each other's comments, in a friendly supportive way. As I argued at the beginning of this section, in order to understand collaborative talk we need to look at its ideational and interactional meaning as well as its physical turn-taking structure. Thus Simon's 'Yea and he kept the rucksack, he's still got it now' not only extends the account, but refers to Sam's experience in a way which I have suggested acknowledges and accepts his friend's interruption as a bid to share in telling the account. Rather than taking over the account at this point Sam as it were returns the compliment 'He took the blankets for his shed'. Like the readjustment which occurs in Karen and Hazel's sharing out of the collaborative account earlier, Sam and Simon manage a subtle reorientation towards each other's speaking rights (which have important consequences for their friendship) while in the process of telling me about the rucksack.

The pattern of interaction in children's collaborative accounts can also express the struggle and dissonance of a particular incident. Karlie (12 years) and Nicole (11 years) are friends, but are conveying an account to me of a less unambiguously collaborative experience. Nicole was talking about what she did with her boyfriend:

Nicole I kissed him once, that was in school, they all pushed me to him. It was funny, weren't it?

Karlie Yea, {he wanted to kiss her

Nicole {I didn't want to kiss him

Karlie /So we was trying to push her to him

Nicole /I didn't want to kiss

Karlie /And then he didn't want to so we just grabbed both of their heads and then just pushed them together

Nicole's first turn is what Labov would call a minimal narrative, (see Chapter Seven) but as the story is taken up and expanded by the two girls, it retrospectively functions as the story abstract (I kissed him once), and the orientation, or scene setting (that was in school, they all pushed me to him). Nicole's 'It was funny, weren't it?' serves in Labov's terms as an evaluation, but it also invites a turn from Karlie. Thus, an utterance can be simultaneously orientated to both the past and the future, and talk can also retrospectively structurally 'refunction' a previous utterance within a new conversational structure (Nicole's initial utterance within the fuller narrative in this case). Just as in Chapter Four we saw children's frame-switching refunction the evaluative meaning of a previous utterance (for example 'standing up for my friends' became 'getting your nose in'), we can see in Nicole and Karlie's account here how this retrospective refunctioning can happen at a grammatical as well as a semantic level. The girls then explain the narrative complication (he wanted to kiss



her/she didn't want to kiss him/so we was trying to push her to him/I didn't want to kiss/and he didn't want to) in what might be called an iconic representation of the original incident, their contradictory voices replaying the half joking struggle as Nicole's friends try to unite the reluctant sweethearts. While Sam and Simon's sensitively tuned turntaking reflects their comfortable relationship in the adventure of finding the rucksack and sharing out its contents, Karlie and Nicole's choppy interaction similarly reflects, both grammatically and semantically, the interpersonal pattern in the kissing incident.

### 6.3 Duetting and girls' group talk

In children's cooperative accounts, their talk sometimes overlaps and merges to the extent that they seem to be almost sharing the conversational floor. This kind of collaboration has been termed 'duetting' by Falk (1980), who uses the term to describe the way couples talk to a third party. Falk suggests that in this context, where the partners have mutual knowledge of a topic, equal authority to express it, a sense of camaraderie between them, and a common communicative goal, linguistic patterns will include speakers repeating or paraphrasing each other, talking simultaneously but not in competition for the floor, and overlapping and continuing each other's turns. Coates (1994) shows that women friends talking together informally may also share the conversational floor, frequently completing and overlapping each other's utterances. She suggests that this departure from what Sacks, Schlegoff and Jefferson (1974) define as the normal rules of turntaking in English, is a 'positive politeness' strategy, signalling the women's closeness and intimacy, and therefore a sign of group strength. While it was my



## c. Riding bikes

Lee            Yea we went down there as well

Geoffrey Up to the very top

Lee            /Where he busted his arm

In the first example, Melissa pauses and Laura completes her list of club activities, and in the second example Melissa breaks in twice to complete an explanation and Laura adds an additional meaning ('or don't play with them....'). Laura's echoing of her friend's phrase 'anything like that' in 'things like that' is typical of the way children repeat or rephrase bits of each other's utterances in this kind of informal talk. I would suggest that this kind of repetition of another voice serves both a social and cognitive function; it expresses a social orientation to the previous speaker (as I discussed in the last section on children taking on other people's voices), and it also gives the speaker 'thinking space' before or after expressing a new idea (Beattie 1983). In the third example, Geoffrey adds new information and Lee instantly orientates to this, adding an additional clause 'Where he busted his arm'. This kind of rapid reorientation to the content of another speaker's turn is very common, as I showed in my analysis of the longer accounts above.

It is sometimes difficult to decide whether two children are sharing an utterance, or whether it is actually the second child who adds an additional point, encoding it as if completing the previous utterance. In example three, for instance, Geoffrey's use of the term 'where' in 'where he busted his arm' retrospectively makes Geoffrey's 'up to the very top' (which itself had extended Lee's previous comment), incomplete. I would suggest that this is the same kind of recursivity, working at a more micro-level structurally, semantically and socially,



which I identified in children's reframings and refunctionings, discussed earlier.

There is another rather different context in my data where the patterns of interaction include overlapping speech and the completion of one speaker's utterance by another, but where the functions and meanings of this kind of interaction are very different. This is where the teacher is working with one or two children, explaining a particular aspect of their work, and a child cuts in to complete the teacher's utterance, in order to show that they already understand what they think she is going to say. In the two examples below, we can see that although there seems to be physical and conceptual collaboration, this is not duetting, by Falk's definition, because of the social asymmetry. These are not two speakers sharing the floor with equivalent authority to explain something to a third party as in my interview data, or close friends expressing shared knowledge together. Rather, there is a sense of struggle as the learner tries to prove that they have already grasped a point, and the teacher resists, wanting to complete her explanation in the first example and explain where the boys are going wrong, in the second. Martie is 11 and Kevin and Kieran are 10 years old.

1.

Mrs K. So you get hundreds and hundreds of little prisms which are the rain drops

Martie which creates this big

Mrs K. /And because they're not they all join together to give

Martie to make this big rainbow

Mrs K. To give this big rainbow cause you will not get a rainbow in the sky if it's just raining, and you won't get a rainbow in the sky if it's

Martie just sunny

2.

Kieran You have to, em, find these, Miss, got to

Mrs K. /Right so you

Kieran /got to see through and you go and see through so you end up tigers and the bushes,

Kevin tigers and the bushes, Miss

Mrs K Well, no, what is actually in this, where is the, that's the 'C'

Kieran And there's the three

Mrs K And the three. So it's where they join. Actually inside that square. Where they actually join. Cause this is B three

The pupils struggle here to demonstrate knowledge, which the teacher accepts in the first example by repeating Martie's phrase 'To make a big rainbow', with the substitution of her own term 'give' for 'make', and first rejects in the second ('Well no, what is actually in this...'), then accepts ('And the three'). In this kind of interaction, children complete teachers' utterances, but teachers rarely complete children's. It is the teacher who is modelling how to talk about knowledge; in a sense the completion of her utterances by children is another instance of them taking on her voice. When she does interrupt children, it is not to complete what they have started to say, but to initiate, or continue, her own approach to the topic, for example '/And because they're not...' in the first example, and '/Right so you' in the second example.

When it is the pupils, however, who are giving information, or an explanation to the teacher, then the pattern becomes more similar to that of the pairs of children relating joint experiences to me in the interviews. There is the same building on each other's utterances to elaborate the account, and rather more repetition and overlap, as they jostle to be the one to relate the 'news' to the teacher. In the next example, Kirsty and Sharon (both 10 years) have been consulting a

library book about the snail they collected as part of the scavenging hunt mentioned in earlier examples. Mrs. Reilly is a parent helper.

Kirsty Miss its got a thousand- thousands of teeth on its tongue.

Sharon Yes, cause we went into the library. Mrs. Reilly and Kirsty went into the library to look it up.

Miss P What's that, the snail?

Sharon Yea.

Pupil Miss, where's the sellotape?

Sharon And it breathes through its side.

Kirsty It breathes through (.....) its side

Sharon [ it's got this little hole

Kirsty It breathes through a hole in its side.

Within the actual physical production of the message in the last four turns, it is hard to separate out the two voices, and the encoding is overlapping and repetitive. Furthermore, although it looks here as if the authorship of 'And it breathes through its side' can be attributed to Sharon, the longer stretch of transcript reproduced in Chapter Eight shows that Sharon is actually here repeating a comment made earlier by Mrs. Reilly, who had herself read it in the library book. Who can we say then is responsible for the encoding, and the conceptual content of what Kirsty and Sharon are saying: the library book, the parent teacher, or themselves? I would suggest that individual authorial commitment and encoding are not such relevant issues here, where knowledge is collaboratively constructed as speakers orientate to each other, and take on bits and pieces of each other's utterances, to create the complex web of dialogical interdependencies within collaborative talk.

I would suggest that some of my data may illustrate the early stages of the kind of collaborative style and floor sharing that Coates identifies among close women friends (1991, 1994, 1996). The 10-12



year old girls perhaps do not have as much language experience as Coates' articulate middle class subjects, or the same kind of shared knowledge and experience, but there is a similar kind of conceptual collaboration (obviously relating to different sorts of issues) going on in the next two examples, the first from Coates' data and the second from my own. In Coates' example she points out that E completes C's initial utterance, overlapped by C, who echoes E's words, changing 'review' to 'change'. She claims the minimal responses from A, B and D also have a crucial role in this group floor sharing.

C: I mean in order to accept that idea you're

{	C: having to.	[	completely
	E: mhm. completely review your		view of your
	D: yes		

{	C: change	]	your view of your husband=	
	E: husband		=	=that's right
	B:		=yes	
	A:		yeah	mhm

(Coates 1993, p182)

In the comparable example from my own data, 10-11 year-old girls are sitting around a table working on mathematical calculations based on fictional cafe bills. The morning session in Camdean has nearly ended, and the girls are discussing how classes get allocated to different lunch sittings:

Julie	This makes me think about school lunch
Alice	We've never been second or first, have we?
Susie	[ Our class, our class is always one of the last to go, aren't we?

- Alice Yes, because we have  
 Susie Just because Mr. Gorman  
 Alice Mr. Gorman  
 Susie Oh yea, Mr. Gorman volunteers us to go last  
 Julie We've never been first  
 Alice Mr. Gorman always, he volunteers for mine and your class,  
 he volunteers for our class to go last!

Alice and Susie repeat each others' words, and overlap and complete each other's utterances. Rather than meaning being located here within individually authored speech acts, it is collaboratively produced. Alice's final comment not only draws Julie's, Susie's and her own previous comments together at the conceptual level, but it also expresses the strong social alignment between the three girls; they speak, as it were, with one voice. I did not find this kind of floor sharing among the boys talking together on their own; it is possible it may happen in intimate contexts outside school, or develop when they are older. Coates points out that there are no studies of men talking informally and intimately together to compare with her data on women (personal communication). Of course, the absence of these studies may reflect the gendered nature of language practices; the social contexts where men tend to gather informally may be less conducive to supportive floor sharing, and also linguists have suggested that women's talk is more focused on interaction, and men's on information (Holmes 1992). I find it all the more interesting, then, that in the relatively intimate setting of the interview boys such as Kevin and Kieran, and Sam and Simon, nevertheless displayed the considerable number of collaborative features described earlier above. Collaborative negotiation in girls' informal talk is not always as harmonious as in the example of Julie, Susie and Alice, above. In the next example, where Jenny and Angie in Camdean (both 10 years old)

are sitting together finishing off some work from earlier in the day, there is a close negotiation of meaning, but the speakers have opposing perspectives, and there is none of the overlap, repetition, or completion of each other's utterances which is typical of 'duetting'. Where Jenny cuts in 'No, I was the one..', this is an interruption registering disagreement, not a kind of floor sharing.

Jenny I'm going to tell Kerry

Angie      What?

Jenny      That we said we were going to ignore her

Angie I never said that, you did

Jenny      Yea you did, you did as well

Angie I said just to pretend that she's not there

Jenny     Yea, that's still saying to ignore

Angie I was the one who thought of it

Jenny of it

↳ No, I was the one who thought

Angie     And you went along. (*To Kerry, who has just returned to the table*) Right, we were going to pretend that we couldn't see you, right. And just now when I says that she never thought of it, but I thought of it, right, and then she went along with it. (*Pause*) I'm sorry, Kerry.

Kerry It's alright. I like a good joke, anyway.

The expression 'I'm telling' means informing a person in authority of someone's misbehaviour, and there are possible shades of this meaning in Jenny's first remark. However, although they establish a functional equivalence between ignoring someone, pretending they're not there and pretending not to see them, Jenny and Angie each claim prior responsibility for planning this piece of unpleasantness.

Although it is Jenny who says she is going to tell Kerry, it is Angie who does the actual telling, and her confessional utterance probably has a complex function, in terms of her relationships with each of the other two girls. While Kerry acknowledges the apology (It's alright),



her final comment actually reframes the whole event, so that Jenny and Angie's plans are re-evaluated as benign rather than malicious, and the whole incident dismissed as a joke. Peace is restored between the three girls, but in terms of meaning we are left with a range of possibilities: a. that it was Jenny who hatched the plot to ignore Kerry, b. that it was Angie, c. that Jenny and Angie meant to be nasty to Kerry d. it was all a light-hearted joke. These alternatives are carried through the dialogue, they are not resolved, but will presumably be drawn on selectively by any of the three participants, in future dialogues. Thus the shared history of knowledge and communication between people is not necessarily one of agreed and mutually accepted knowledge and meanings, but may also be one of internally conflicting perspectives and interpretations, which will be revisited in different ways in other contexts and conversations in the future.

#### **6.4 Mixed gender and boys' group talk**

I did not find the 'Going to lunch' kind of collaborative floor sharing in the boys' group talk I recorded, nor indeed in the mixed gender informal talk among groups of children. In both male and mixed group talk, the pattern of interaction seemed much more choppy and competitive. It could be argued that this has more to do with the kinds of contexts in which I have recorded groups of boys, or mixed groups of children interacting, than with gendered speech styles (cf Freed and Greenwood 1996). Certainly the boys' and mixed group conversations come from relatively public contexts within the classroom, the corridor and the school bus. But to some extent it is the boys' interactive style, particularly some boys' propensity for competition and display, which makes these settings public. The 'Going to lunch' conversation between girls was also recorded in the

relatively public classroom context, and the next example below of a boys only conversation was recorded in what might seem to be the potentially more intimate setting of the changing room at the swimming pool. My data would suggest that although boys use an affiliative and supportive interactional style in some informal contexts (for example the interview, working together in class), some boys are more ready than the girls are, to exploit the potential of other contexts for competition and display. While I have recorded examples of both affiliative and competitive styles from almost every boy I recorded, it is the most dominant boys in the class- Darren, Martie and Gary, who tend to use most competition and display in interaction, and to set the interpersonal style of larger group discussions in the class.

As in Moss's account (1996) of boys' informal discussion about wrestling magazines, children in my research, in the more choppy and competitive male and mixed gender discussions, throw in gobbits of personal experience, vying to demonstrate some kind of personal expertise or unique experience, and struggling to gain the conversational floor for a longer turn. However, although at first sight this kind of talk appears conflictual rather than collaborative, I would suggest that it does represent an important kind of collaboration, of a rather different style from the floor sharing of the girls' group, or the duetting in the interviews. In this more competitive collaboration, a topic is developed across children's individual turns, and a considerable amount of cumulative information is shared. The next example below, recorded in the swimming pool changing room, is typical of this kind of male group interaction. Darren is 12, Martie 11 and Geoffrey 10 years old

- Darren What about on telly, those, those, that em diving Olympics thing, they have em real high diving board, they stand backwards and there's like flip themselves right way round and just hit the water:
- Geoff [ Yea I bet that: hurts
- Martie Sh, no it doesn't, the higher it is
- Darren /Oi, where's your er (....) comb
- Martie A brush, there, it's in my bag, the higher it is, it isn't harder to dive off, it's harder to go down cause the pressure is pushing you up, the gravity
- Darren /About pressure and all that (*laugh*)
- Martie The gravity is bringing you towards the ground
- Darren [ Who's ever been in a racing car?
- Boys Me, me
- Darren A formula one?
- Boys Yea, yea
- Darren While it's going, yea?
- Boys Yea, me
- Darren A formula three thousand (....) ?
- Martie A formula three thousand isn't as power, powerful as a formula one
- Darren I never said it was, so?
- Martie I've been in a formula one
- Boy I've been (....)
- Darren [ What about G-force, your head's like that. You're going round the corner and you're going (*motor noises*), no, but with G-force, your head, right, cause, cause you're going one way and the wind's blowing the other, your head's going (*car noise + laughter*)
- Geoff Yea, I'd laugh if a racing car driver, if his head came off (*general loud laughter*)
- Darren And his car just went off the edge and went right through the finishing line.

Here, within the context of competition for conversational space, competition in terms of who has had the most impressive experience with racing cars, and competition in holding and entertaining the general audience, there is also collaboration, both at the turntaking



level (Darren's extension of Geoffrey's comment in his final turn), and, more significantly, in Darren's comments on G-force and racing drivers, which develop the questions about conflict between forces of movement and gravity that were first introduced by Martie in relation to Olympic divers. This topic is not developed any further, and members of the group may be left with a number of fairly hazy ideas about the physics involved. The next example, however, from a mixed gender group, shows how such an exchange can develop into a longer and more detailed discussion, involving more extensive sharing of knowledge and experience.

Tina and Sherri (almost 12 years) are from the oldest, most dominant group of girls in the class. They manage to combine being 'good pupils' with being the objects of sexual interest for the most dominant boys. (Darren (12) is 'going out' with Sherri). Geoffrey (10) and Alan (11) often hang around the more dominant boys, asking questions and trying to get in on a piece of the action. The topic of smoking arises in the following way, as the children are chatting over their maths work:

a.

Darren Oi- you got a comb? Did you get up late?

Tina No, no, I was just messing around- went barmy with it this morning

Sherri Permed it, and it went (...)

Darren (to Tina) Do you curl your hair?

Tina No. Perm

Darren Soft perm (*laughs*)

Philip Is that a soft perm?

Sherri No, it's a cold perm

Darren (to Sherri) Have you ever smoked? (*pause*) Have you?

Geoff He has

Darren I have. You don't know how to. You go (*laughter*)

Geoff Probably go- she, she'll go (*sound of sharp intake of breath and laughter*)

Philip No, she'd probably go like this

Sherri No I put it, I put it round like this

Darren I do it like, I go, I go

Sherri I go like that

Geoff I go like that

Sherri What are you doing? (*laughter*)

Geoff I'm doing that on (.....)

Darren [ I had a cigarette: like that little, yea, I went into Stars and I used to go (*miming*) arrrrh, blinking (.....)

Geoff Guess what I done, right what I done, I had one of my dad's

Philip /Oh, look I done it, I had this fag like that, right, you put

Darren [no, no,

that's a cigar I went (*makes sound of choking*)

Philip [No, no:, you get fags like that, right, you put the end in your mouth, don't bite make sure your lips aren't wet, breathe back, and smoke comes from your thing

Having lost face in front of Philip and failed to demonstrate expert knowledge about hair perms, Darren brings up the subject of smoking where he feels sure he is more knowledgeable than Sherri and the other children, and proceeds to tease her about her lack of experience, aided by Geoffrey and Philip. Darren, Philip and Geoffrey then vie for the floor in their overlapping, simultaneous recounting of experiences with cigarettes and cigars, with Philip gaining centre stage momentarily with his concise explanation of how smoking is done. The conversation then moves on (see below), via roll-ups to dope, with a short intermission where the School Secretary arrives in the classroom to ask for the children to return their dental forms.

b.

Tina My Dad can do that (...) I only had two drags, that's all I had,

Philip You can't get a fag that big anyway!

Tina He goes, he goes 'I'll see you later, then', I go (*laughter*)

Geoff I still have a stomach ache, I got well (....)

- Darren *(answering Philip)* Yea, a roll-up *(laughter)*  
 I found this roll-up
- Philip That's the only one,
- Darren Once, I found this roll-up, right,
- Geoff Have you ever smoked dope before?
- Darren I've smelt the stuff,
- Philip It smells disgusting.
- Darren It stinks.
- Philip Roll-ups are disgusting!  
*(70 secs)*
- Sch Sec *(next to them)* And could you bring it back to me tomorrow?
- Mrs K. Er can we have some shut up in here. May I remind all of you that there is a dental inspection tomorrow. (Pupils: Oh goody!) And please can we have our dental forms back
- School OK so could you get it signed, I meant to give it to you on Friday but I forgot, so if I can have it tomorrow? *(sounds as if she's next to them, then leaves classroom)*
- Geoff Medical, got a medical thing
- Darren Let's have a read at the bottom? What's it say? 'Please return the- whatever' *(laughter)*
- Geoff /'form'
- Darren /Back to the school by Tuesday,' -got to bring it back tomorrow, man 'Thank you'.  
*(90secs)*
- Geoff Have you ever smoked dope? Is that that black stuff which melts
- Philip No, it don't melt, it's black, it's black, yea
- Darren Yea you got, and it's hard and you have to melt all the *(.....)*
- Philip *(You*  
 have to get it so it goes you have to burn it so it goes
- Darren /Yea,  
 ? yea, like that, well that is *(....)*
- Philip Lovely, innit
- Darren Sick
- Tina *(protesting voice)* It's lovely



Darren My mum used to smoke it and like you could smell it, and she goes, she goes out

Pupil [.....),

Darren she goes out to make a cigarette and I go (*sound of rapid inhaling*) and she comes back in (*sound of coughing*) 'What's wrong with you?'

Philip You don't do it like that, you smoke it in the fag

Darren I know, right,

Philip But you didn't, you done it complete wrong

The topic development here, from hair styles to smoking cigarettes to smoking roll-ups and dope proceeds through the jostling for turns, taunting and teasing, with individuals now and then gaining the floor long enough to give a brief explanation or anecdote. Darren's claims of expertise are continually challenged by Philip ('Is that a soft perm?', '/No, no, you get fags like that, right', 'You can't get a fag that big anyway!' and 'But you didn't, you done it complete wrong'), and there is a continual struggle for dominance between the two boys throughout the exchange. The topic development is in fact prompted by Philip's 'You can't get a fag that big anyway!', where Darren counters 'Yea, a roll-up' and tries unsuccessfully to tell an anecdote 'Once, I found this roll-up, right', which is however cut short by Geoffrey's question about dope. Undaunted by the school secretary's interruption, Geoffrey returns to the question of dope again, and after struggling with Philip to respond to Geoffrey, Darren manages this time to tell an anecdote (criticised again by Philip). While this discussion is strongly driven by social agendas (the rivalry between Darren and Philip, the boys' desire to display themselves as experts to each other and to the girls), it also involves the collaborative accumulation of a shared pool of knowledge. The children involved hear and see a collection of demonstrations about how to smoke a cigarette, and Geoffrey, Darren and Philip all contribute information

about what cannabis resin looks like. Philip explains you have to put it inside a cigarette. Darren says 'you could smell it', 'It stinks', 'It's disgusting'. Between them, the children share and exchange a fair amount of technical vocabulary: cigarette, fag, cigar, to have a drag, roll-up, dope, all used with contextual information. Children involved in this conversation could now try smoking a cigarette (if they have not done so already), and could probably also recognise dope smoking, and, perhaps most importantly, know how to talk about this teenage activity, using the appropriate vocabulary.

## 6.5 Conclusion

I have described the different patterns of collaboration which I found within the children's talk, as they built on and extend each others' comments, duet, shared and competed for the floor, and gave accounts together to the teacher. I have shown how children orientate towards each other through their management of turntaking, grammatical structures, and in the development of larger conceptual units across a conversation. In relation to these larger units, collaborative meaning making is recursive and iterative, with dialogical connections crossing and criss-crossing the boundaries of speaker turns and conversational structures.

Children's patterns of collaboration also serve to express, consolidate and pursue particular interactional goals, and the structure of a collaborative account can sometimes be seen as a metaphor for the interactional tone of the event being related. Although girls' group talk seems to illustrate some of the female gendered collaborative features identified in other sociolinguistic research (eg Coates 1986 and 1993 and Holmes 1992), I have shown that these are also found

in talk between friendship pairs of boys in the interview, and that girls also use a range of other interactive styles, (for example in Nicole and Karlie's account of kissing, and in Angie and Jenny's talk about Kelly). Again, although the final examples of mixed gender and boys' group talk show the kind of competitive jostling for the floor which was identified as a male gendered style by sociolinguistic research in the 1970s and 1980s (Freed and Greenwood 1996), I have shown that this talk can also include collaborative features like duetting, and that the overall effect of such interactions can be the pooling and exchanging of experiences from different members of the group, in relation to a central theme. Freed and Greenwood (1996) suggest that rather than being a question of simple correlations between linguistic forms and functions, there are more complex interactions between gender, and other linguistic and social phenomenon. Similarly, Ochs argues that 'the relation of language to gender is constituted and mediated by the relation of language to stances, social acts, social activities and other social constructs' (1992 p337). I shall be exploring some other aspects of these relationships in Chapter Seven.

Finally, I have suggested that although meaning making in talk is essentially collaborative, this should not be taken to imply that a shared history of communication between people is one of agreed and mutually accepted knowledge. On the contrary, there is frequently ambiguity, inconsistency and conflict as speakers negotiate different kinds of turns and frames, to present alternative perspectives and interpretations which will be revisited in the future.



## Chapter Seven: Children's use of conversational narrative

### 7.1 Introduction

In the last three chapters, I explored in some depth the three related foci of my research into children's informal language practices: the various interrelationships between text and context, the children's different uses of reported speech and other people's voices, and the essentially collaborative nature of their construction of meaning. In this chapter, these three areas of investigation are the focal points of my study of the children's use of narrative. I shall analyse the stories they told in the interviews in some detail, and shall also discuss the briefer stories and anecdotes they exchanged among themselves during the school day. The links these narratives make with their conversational and broader contexts, the children's use of dialogue within the stories, and the various levels of collaboration between story tellers and listeners, are all centrally implicated in narrative structure, function and meaning, and hence in children's use of stories to construct knowledge and identity.

In the data I collected, the 10-12 year olds were constantly telling stories in the course of exchanging ideas, explaining, arguing, or simply entertaining one another and passing the time. Narratives ranged from fleeting anecdotes to more lengthy, clearly framed accounts. Some were told by one speaker, some collaboratively, and other stories emerged piecemeal, through the course of a conversation. In this chapter I shall first briefly refer to my own theoretical

position, which was introduced in Chapter Two, and then analyse a number of the stories I collected in some detail.

In Chapter Two I referred to the substantial literature on the role of conversational narrative in representing and reflecting on personal experience. Studies have shown that children use narrative to pursue social relations, explore identity and negotiate cultural values.

Classical narrative theory tends to focus on the text, and the ways in which it transforms experience. This division between experience and text is reflected in Labov's influential sociolinguistic study of how the structure of conversational narratives enables them to fulfil referential and evaluative functions. I am particularly interested in the evaluative functions and features of stories (why the story is being told at a particular moment, and how its point is expressed), since these can suggest how children are using and constructing stories to negotiate knowledge and identity. Labov suggests that evaluation can entail the narrator adding an explanation or additional description to highlight a particular point (external evaluation), putting evaluative comments into the mouths of characters within the narrative (embedded evaluation), or using a variety of intensifiers (gestures, sound effects, quantifiers, repetition), comparisons, and so on to give emphasis and build up suspense within the story (Labov 1972). Although the evaluative function would seem to focus on the relation between the text and the narrating event, and Labov sees intensifiers as including non-verbal performative features, he has however a fairly limited concept of conversational context, because his research was carried out on stories elicited in interviews specifically designed for that purpose. Most naturally occurring narratives are told between people who have longer and more complex histories than Labov and his informants. In addition, to demonstrate the point

of the story, evaluative strategies draw the audience in to involve them in the narration, so that they often respond by supporting (or sometimes disputing) the narrator's point of view. The evaluative message of stories strongly invokes a response and thus is a central part of how they operate dialogically, and how meaning is negotiated (cf Tannen 1989 on the importance of involvement in order to create understanding).

In the account which follows, I extend Labov's ideas about evaluation in two main ways. First, I use a more extended notion of context by drawing on the work of researchers within the ethnography of communication tradition, who have focused more directly on the relationship between narrative, and the context of its performance. While some writers within this area tend to separate off artistic uses of language as a special category for analysis (Sherzer 1987, Finnegan 1992), I explained that my own approach was closer to that of Shuman (1986), who analyses adolescent stories as part of their ongoing conversational negotiation of relationships and entitlement, and shows that, from this perspective, the boundaries between event, story and narrative context can become blurred. Because I collected continuous recordings over a number of days, I am able to analyse spontaneous, naturally occurring narratives in the light of what has been said in the conversation leading up to the story, links with stories and conversations from other contexts, and the relationship between the conversationalists. Second, I use ideas from Bakhtin and Volosinov to explore how the dynamic, dialogical and intertextual features of conversational narratives are encoded within the text. In particular, I focus on children's use of reported speech and argue that this has a crucial role in enabling children to explore and negotiate a number of evaluative perspectives, in relation to constructing



knowledge and identity. The analysis of reported speech as represented in the text also reveals important aspects of the dialogical and contextual realisation of narrative evaluation, and, more generally, of meaning.

As I shall discuss in more detail below, the 10-12 year-old children in my study use stories to explore and evaluate different kinds of behaviour, personal rights and moral issues which are particularly pertinent to their transitory stage between childhood and adolescence. In order to understand the function and meaning of stories in my own data, and the ways in which they contribute to children's negotiation of knowledge and identity, I shall analyse the links between the story text and the context in which it is produced, in relation to the complex and dynamic processes of evaluation being used by children. I shall demonstrate that these stories are highly sensitive to the settings in which they are told, and reflect their narrating contexts in both theme and structure. As I explained in Chapter Three, I had not planned to focus on narrative in the research, and the stories were not elicited. They emerged spontaneously in the conversations between children, and in the interviews.

I analysed fifty of these stories using Labov's schema (1972), and also examined them in relation to their conversational context, their use of reported speech, and other intertextual links. The stories below illustrate points about structural, dialogical and evaluative features, and the relationships between these, which occur across the sample. I have grouped the stories in two sections, stories from the interviews and stories from continuous recordings of children's informal talk, because the interview stories share certain contextual features, which are reflected in their structure and function. There are of course other storytelling contexts which I have not been able to record, for

example gossiping with friends out of school, or chatting with other family members at home. But I would suggest that the features I shall discuss are so essential to the accomplishment of function and meaning, that I would also expect to find them in stories from contexts right across the children's lives.

## 7.2 Stories from the interviews

Labov (1972) found that the conversational stories he collected from adults and adolescents tended to have a recurring five section structure. They started with a summary of what they were about (the abstract); followed by a comment about the setting (orientation); then an account of the main action (complication); how it all finally worked out (resolution); and sometimes a comment linking the story back into the ongoing conversation (coda).

The first story, from my interview with Karen (11 years) and her friend Helen (10 years), demonstrates the structural pattern identified by Labov and how it becomes adapted within a specific conversational context. It also shows the way in which the evaluative functions of stories are explored through the characters' voices, and through links with the surrounding conversation. Karen had been telling me about all the animals she used to have at home, 'three different houses ago', as she put it. At various times the family had thirty-six dogs, parrots, cockateels, budgies, ferrets, rabbits, cats, hamsters, and guinea-pigs. Karen explained that they moved house because her parents split up and divorced, but then got back together again (although they had not legally re-married). The conversation moved back to the family pets, and I asked Karen if both her parents liked animals.

Initials in the third column refer to Labov's structural elements: A= abstract, O= orientation, C= complication, R= resolution, c=coda. Where there are alternative possible structural sections, I have indicated these: C2= additional complication, R2= alternative resolution.

Janet Are they both keen on animals?

Karen Well my dad isn't that keen, my mum is. We used to A  
have this little dog like this called Tiny and my dad  
sold her.

Well we were going to try and get rid of some of our O  
dogs, one day a man come and he said, he (*dad*) was  
showing him all the other dogs and he didn't show  
him Tiny

and he goes, 'Who lives in that kennel there?' and he C  
(*dad*) goes, 'Oh, that's my wife's dog, Tiny' and he  
took one look at her and he said, 'I'll have her, yes,'  
he goes, 'I want her' and my dad goes, 'Er, alright'.  
So he sold it. Just before the man went I went into  
my house and I goes, 'Mum, Dad's sold Tiny!' and she  
just burst into tears and so I come running up going,  
'Dad, if you sell Tiny Mum will never talk to you  
ever again!'.  
He goes, 'Sorry, you can't sell (*buy*) that' R  
and I took off, rushed into the house with Tiny and C2  
my mum just, her face, she was crying her eyes out,  
as soon as she saw her, she goes, 'Give me her here  
now' and

when he come in she goes, 'You horrible thing, I R2  
never, told you I'd never sell Tiny as long as I live!'  
And then

Helen /As long as it's lived as well

Karen And then my dad let one of the dogs out, well he let R3/  
Tiny out and he thought this other dog would be c  
playful with her, and she killed it.

The use of 'this', signalling a deictic switch away from the time and  
place of the current conversation into the story is common in the



opening of children's stories (see also the next three below), and Karen's phrase 'like this' accompanied holding up her hands to show just how small Tiny actually was. Labov points out that, in contrast to the grammatically simple abstract, the orientation section (framed here by 'well', signalling the start of the main story) is often the most grammatically complicated, because the teller wants to sketch out what was happening before, or alongside the main narrative events. However, as Karen had previously explained to me about her family's large number of dogs, she can pass fairly quickly over this section. The 'complication' section starts where the man wants to buy Tiny, and Karen's dad finally agrees. The 'complication' includes the significant actions in a story, often accompanied by reported speech and switches in and out of the present tense ('he goes', 'I come running up'). This use of what has been termed the 'conversational historic present' tense in stories (Wolfson, 1982) is generally believed to make events seem more real and immediate, drawing the listener in to become closely involved in the story. Wolfson suggests that the switch itself, from past to present tense, catches the audience's attention, to ensure that they listen carefully to the most important part of the action.

So far, I have been keeping close to Labov's description of the various narrative sections. I would suggest however that, because of where it occurs in the conversation, this story can be read at a number of different levels. In answer to my immediate question, it demonstrates that Karen's father is less keen on animals than her mother. He almost sells a favourite pet but the situation is resolved by Karen's intervention and her father's retraction of the sale 'Sorry, you can't buy that' (R). But the story is also about the relationship between Karen's parents and Karen's role in the family, explored through the

'Tiny' incident. The story thus develops comments she made earlier in the interview about her parents' divorce and subsequent reconciliation, and the 'resolution' of the story on this level, where 'Selling Tiny' is really about the misunderstandings and dynamics of her parents' relationship, seems to occur later, when Karen returns Tiny to her mother (R2).

In addition to shaping the structure of the story (reducing the need for an orientation section, suggesting a different point of narrative resolution), the preceding conversation has semantic links with the contents; we hear the account in the light of Karen's earlier comments about her parents, and this also affects the overall evaluative functions of the story, which are to do both with answering my question and with reflecting on her parents' relationship. I have suggested that Karen's final comment, prompted by Helen, could be seen as a coda, linking this specific story back to the general conversational theme of experiences with pets, or, alternatively, as the final resolution (R3) in Tiny's story. I shall return later to this question of structural ambiguity, which often occurs in conversational narratives near the boundaries with other speakers' turns.

Evaluation, as Labov suggests, is achieved in a number of different ways within the narration. Karen uses intensifiers such as repetition and quantifiers. 'Never', 'ever' (repeated) and 'as long as I live' to describe the strength of Karen's mother's attachment to Tiny. The whole first half of the story, concerning her father's interaction with the dog-buyer, is told rapidly in a fairly flat voice and contrasts strongly with the drama and anguish of the second half, where Karen builds up the tension through her choice of verbs (burst into tears, running, took off, rushed, crying), and through the accumulation of clauses (underlined below) delaying the point where her mother

finally realises that Tiny has not been sold after all (I took off, rushed into the house with Tiny and my mum just, her face, she was crying her eyes out, as soon as she saw her, she goes, 'Give me her here now'). From the point where Karen races into the house to tell her mother what is happening, the characters' voices become more and more dramatic and agitated on the tape. Karen gives her father a gruff, matter of fact voice, which contrasts with the exaggeratedly hysterical, tearful voice she creates for her mother. Her construction of their voices is central to Karen's portrayal of the characters of her father and mother, her mother's devastation at the sale of Tiny, and her father's thoughtlessness. I would suggest that the way in which Karen creates her mother's voice, with its exaggerated agitation, conveys a slight distancing of her own evaluation of events, from her mother's, thus commenting on what she says at the same time as reproducing it (Volosinov 1973). The listener hears, behind Karen's mother's hysteria, Karen the narrator sympathising, but slightly detached. After all, in the story Karen's father does not initially show Tiny to the dog-buyer, and it is only when he is put on the spot that he finally agrees to sell the dog. And, immediately Karen explains her mother's feelings, her father revokes the sale. Even though her father is responsible for Tiny's subsequent death, this is through ignorance rather than intention: 'he thought this other dog would be playful with her'. We can understand Karen's mother's point of view, but Karen seems to be suggesting that her father is not entirely blameworthy. The voices which Karen creates for her parents, and the words she puts into their mouths are therefore not just a device for increasing dramatic involvement, but are also vital to the evaluative functions of the story. They entail a switch in focalisation (Gennette 1980); taking on her father's voice and then her mother's provides a way for Karen



to explore, albeit briefly, her father's perspective, and her mother's feelings, as well as commenting on them through the way in which she presents their voices.

Although Karen's account of events in her story (the referential function) is clear, its evaluative significance is more ambiguous. Is her father stupid, uncaring, or malicious? Is her mother badly treated by Karen's father, or unreasonably hysterical? Children often made evaluative references back to a previous story in conversations, sometimes qualifying or reversing their original position. Following the account about Tiny, Karen told a another story about a dog aged fifteen that had survived three strokes, but was badly injured falling from an upstairs window and had to be put down. She commented 'even my dad was crying that day', thus somewhat softening the impression of him in 'Selling Tiny'. Rather than providing a definitive evaluative comment on an event, I would suggest that Karen's story is just one of many conversational narratives through which she visits and revisits the puzzle of her parents' relationship, of their different evaluative perspectives, and of how she can relate to what is going on. The story's function and meaning for Karen, and probably also for Helen, are related not just to its immediate context in the interview conversation with me, but also to other conversations and other contexts where Karen has told stories around a similar theme.

I have shown that Karen tells her story in response to a question from me about whether both her parents like animals, but suggested that the story also comments on an earlier related theme in the conversation: her parents' relationship. Subsequent comments Karen makes later in the interview also refer back to the themes of the story, and its evaluative content. In addition to referring backwards and forwards to themes in their own talk, children's stories also make

structural and thematic links with the stories of others. In the interview from which the next example is taken, Lee (11 years) and Geoffrey (10) talked extensively to me about their interest in animals and birds. Lee had just told a lengthy and complicated account about a local stray black cat adopted by his family, when Geoffrey offered the following story of his own:

Geoff There was this black stray cat who started coming A  
into our garden for two nights

Lee Is it really scruffy?

Geoff Yea, and it didn't have no collar. It had no collar, and O  
it had white bits at the paws, right on the paws and it  
had little white under there,  
and every night when it came into our garden we C  
thought 'Oh, we got no food for it, all we got is dog  
food', cause we've only got a dog, and I said to my  
mum 'Mum, do you want me to go to the shops or  
will it be closed?'  
and she said 'I think it'll be closed, it's nine o'clock!' R  
(laughter)

Janet So what did you do?

Geoff I thought 'Em, do cats like bread?' cause I had a few C2  
sandwiches, and my mum said 'That one might, you  
never know',  
so I gave it a bit of bread and it eat a bit, it eat a bit, R2  
only a little bit (yea)

Lee And my Uncle Edward and my Auntie Jennie and the c  
others give my mum a cockatiel.....

Geoffrey's use of deixis in 'this black stray cat' signals that he has a story to tell and Lee's question 'Is it really scruffy?' both invites Geoffrey to tell the story, and also helps to shape the content of his orientation section. This concentrates wholly on the appearance of the cat (including the lack of collar which suggests it is a stray), so that the boys can determine whether Geoffrey's cat is the same as Lee's

stray. The complicating action is as usual conveyed mainly through dialogue, either spoken or as a way of expressing thought (Geoffrey uses the past tense throughout- perhaps because this is not an action-packed-crisis type of story). The story initially finishes at 'R' (Resolution) with Lee and my laughter, which confirms the humour of Geoffrey's mum's comment. This would suggest that the cat goes hungry. However, in response to my question 'So what did you do?' (prompted by my expectations of a different kind of resolution), Geoffrey provides a continuation of the complicating action, and a new resolution, with a particularly striking rhythmic repetition<sup>14</sup>:

Geoffrey I gave it a bit of bread,  
                   and it eat a bit,  
                   it eat a bit,  
                   only a little bit

In the story above Geoffrey tentatively 'tells' himself as a gentle person, initially deflecting the evaluative point onto the humour of his own lack of sense of time, but then focusing on the dilemma of how to find food for the cat. Twelve minutes later in the interview, this theme of responding to animals in distress is taken up again by Lee. I have included the remarks which occurred just before and after Lee's story, to show the immediate conversational context.

Geoff Since I started drawing birds, like in Miss Clark's class  
           I had to draw that parrot, right the big parrot about  
           that big

Lee / I drew the man, didn't I?

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<sup>14</sup> The parallelism and rhythm here supports Jakobson's point that the poetic function is one of many speech functions which are always co-present, but in variable and shifting hierarchies of dominance (Jakobson 1971, quoted in Bauman 1992 p183). It represents a fleeting 'breakthrough into performance', in an interplay with other communicative frames (Hymes 1975 quoted in Bauman 1992 p184).



Geoff Since I drew that, whenever I started getting bored, I went upstairs, got my paper, and drew a couple of birds, (yes), tiny ones (yes). I used, whenever I went over me uncle's house, I used to take a couple of pieces of paper and some felts like and draw all these birds parrot

Lee /Yesterday I was on, I was walking with my mum, we O walked past this bush, and there was this nest and it was fallen down on the floor, and I goes 'Mum look, there's a nest on the floor', and I C goes 'Mum can I go and have a look at it?' and I went over there and there was four baby chicks in it, little chicks, I think they were willow warbler and my mum said 'Climb up and put them back in the tree', so and I had some bread, eaten some bread, so I fed it bits of bread, cause she had to go to the phone, and em she waited and I put it back up in the tree and its mum's with it now. R Yea, cause someone, someone had pulled the nest c down, out of the tree

Geoff I know this kid called Richie Binns who knocked a nest down } on purpose

Lee } They'd probably be dead by now

Geoff /three little birds in there, one of them got thrown in my court and got squashed, one of them got dumped in a bush and that got squashed, and one got run over.

Janet Aah, that's a shame

Geoff And I spent all that time putting worms and that in the nest, put it up in the tree, Richie Binns knocked it back down again. That's, then, that's when they got squashed.

In contrasting his own behaviour with that of whoever pulled the nest out of the tree, Lee presents his own actions as both a practical response (putting the nest back) and a moral response, (redressing thoughtless cruelty). However, his story is also a response to Geoffrey's earlier story about the stray cat. In fact, the striking way in

which the structure of Lee's story mirrors that of Geoffrey's, told twelve minutes earlier, is itself an evaluative comment, both on Geoffrey's perspective (how to respond to creatures in distress, how to tell gentleness) and on the boys' friendship. Coates (1996) found in her research on stories told among women friends that this kind of mirroring of theme and structure played a key role in the expression and development of their friendship, and a similar process seems to be occurring here. In the boys' stories, the complicating action sections in both cases start with a problem described in dialogue, followed by a polite request to mum. Mum then offers helpful advice, and Lee/Geoffrey give the animal or bird some bread. Lee's moral alignment with his friend is thus expressed through the structural alignment of his story, right through to the three part list at the end, (a kind of collaborative poetic parallelism), as demonstrated by comparing the following extracts:

Table 7.1

The stray cat	The bird's nest
we thought 'Oh, we got no food for it, all we got is dog food',	I goes 'Mum look, there's a nest <i>problem</i> on the floor',
'Mum, do you want me to go to the shops or will it be closed?'	'Mum, can I go and have a look <i>request</i> at it?'
my mum said 'That one might, you never know',	my mum said 'Climb up and put <i>advice</i> them back in the tree',
so I gave it a bit of bread and it eat a bit, it eat a bit, only a little bit	and I had some bread, eaten some bread, so I fed it bits of bread, <i>giving bread (3 part list)</i>

In order to convey their own evaluative perspective, Lee and Geoffrey construct particular kinds of voices for themselves in the story- gently spoken, polite, caring voices which seem consistent with the kinds of

attitudes they are portraying. The management of these voices, as in Karen's story about Tiny, is an important part of the evaluative function of the story, and of their own exploration of a particular aspect of themselves. Again, the overall evaluation is not entirely settled; it shifts in the first story when Geoffrey extends the complicating action, and the accounts of other children's thoughtlessness and cruelty continue to be explored at some length by the two boys after the extracts given above:

- Lee           The ones I found yesterday are probably dead by now  
cause this girl I know called Ellie goes to (*name of school*)  
she'll probably nick them, cause she loves birds.
- Geoff        I know someone called Alan Horton, whenever he sees a  
bird's nest he climbs up the tree and goes 'There's eggs  
in it' and takes the whole bird's nest into his shed, gets  
the eggs and smashes them with a hammer

The boys' repeated contrasts of their own actions with those of others suggests a need for further confirmation and reassurance that their own evaluative position is justified. It may be that Lee and Geoffrey are talking about aspects of themselves which do not fit easily into powerful cultural conceptions of masculinity (Connell 1995), so they need more discursive space than if they were simply repeating generally held evaluative viewpoints. Children often gain a sense of their own identities through differentiating themselves from others (Miller et al 1992), and while Geoffrey's animation of Alan Horton involves a switch in focalisation and enables him to briefly explore this different, more violent version of masculinity, Geoffrey is also positioning himself as different from Alan, and similar to Lee. The gendering of identity through story is explored further in the examples below.



The management of the voices children gave themselves and others in many other stories I collected was important both to the evaluative point they were making, and to the construction of their own identity. For instance, in my interview with Terry (11 years) and Keith (12 years), Terry uses snatches of dialogue to build up the tension and violence in his account of a neighbourhood fight which had happened the previous night.

Terry When they came back to do the windows there was ten of them. I was going, 'Rick, you're dead, you're all dead, come out here'. Cause they had, you know the new baseball bats with the metal tips? .....they were just trying to cause trouble and that's how the fight started again 'Come on you c.u.n.t.' and all that lot, and then they hit my dad on the back of the head.....Ruby knew they were going to do it. Ruby run in her house, got a blade, 'I'm gonna kill them, I'm gonna shove this blade so far down their throat'...

The violence in Terry's story is portrayed both through his account of actions, and also through the dialogue, which in the interview, was forcefully verbally recreated. In his full account (which emerged gradually over about fifteen minutes in the interview), Terry makes it clear that the fight started because his sister was wrongly accused of stealing someone's walkman, so he is able to use reported speech to portray himself and his family and friends in the story as tough and violent, but justly so. The aggressive, macho voice he gives himself is therefore also virtuous- this is underlined in his account by the arrival of the police who arrest most of the youths who were attacking the family.

I have discussed how Lee's story echoes both the theme and the structure of Geoffrey's earlier account, and how Helen prompts the coda for Karen's story about Tiny. In the next example, two boys collaborate closely in constructing a story, and reported voices again play a central evaluative function. Sam provides part of the abstract, and the resolution, for Simon's story about why he has been grounded. In Sam and Simon's interview, as in Lee and Geoffrey's, a story becomes a focal point which is referred back to in subsequent discussions around the issues which it explores. Sam is 10, and Simon is 12 years old. I had just asked the boys if they played together after school:

- Sam     At the moment he's been grounded for a month. He's     A  
           still grounded.
- Janet   Why have you been grounded?
- Simon   Ah, cause of a boy
- Janet   What did you do?
- Simon   I bought some Lego off my friend, right,                     O  
           and his mum, he told his mum he let me lend it and         C  
           em his mum writ a letter saying can he have it back,  
           right, so he got it back and I asked for my money  
           back and he didn't give me it, so I asked him again  
           and he nicked it out of his mum's purse.                     R
- Sam     He (*Simon*) got grounded for it, though.                     R2/c

The final 'though' is important to the evaluative message of the story, signalling the question of injustice which is the point of telling it. This became clearer when I questioned Simon further about what happened. After a discussion about what grounding means and the various prohibitions it can include, the boys together provided a more explicit evaluation of the point of the story. Mr. Perry is the boys' head teacher at Lakeside:

- Janet            So is that say to be grounded for a month, is that quite a severe.....?
- Simon           Em. I'm not going to do it again.
- Janet           So what was she particularly cross about?
- Sam            The police coming round, I think. If the police never come round, and the head teacher, I think he'd only be grounded for about a week.
- Janet           What had you done that was so wrong?
- Simon           I kept on asking him to give me my money.
- Sam            Yea, and cause it was his fault for nicking the money and it got all put onto Simon, so really he (*Simon*) never done nothing.
- Simon           But he's (*the other boy*) the one who done it and Mr. Perry goes, em he should have been punished as well. He should, he should have been the one who was punished, got punished.
- Sam            He was lucky that Mr. Perry didn't do him<sup>15</sup>. He (*Mr Perry*) said he can't do nothing cause it was out of school time.

Here, Simon seems reluctant to come out directly with an explicit evaluation of his own, instead giving most of the evaluation through the voice of his head teacher: 'Mr. Perry goes, em he should have been punished as well. He should, he should have been the one who was punished, got punished.' Although there is a reporting clause 'Mr Perry goes', the reported speech here is like what has been termed 'quasi-direct speech' (Bakhtin 1981) or 'free indirect discourse' (Toolan, 1988), which falls between direct and indirect reported speech, and is a kind of hybrid of the authorial voice coloured by the character's voice. Thus it is ambiguous to the listener as to whether it is Simon or Mr. Perry who says the other boy is the one who should

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<sup>15</sup> A teacher or other authority figure 'doing' someone means giving them a severe telling off. Used in other contexts, it can also imply a physical assault.



have been punished, and Simon is able to add authority to this evaluative viewpoint (Mr Perry is both an authority figure and lacks the boys' vested interest), without having to assume full personal responsibility for it (cf Hill and Irvine 1992). Apart from Simon's comment 'but he's the one who done it', all through the discussion he positions himself so that it is Sam who voices the evaluations. His answer to my question 'What had you done that was so wrong?' was particularly effective as he had Sam practically jumping out of his seat to vindicate his friend. The presentation of self here is being skilfully deflected so that, in a tricky situation when it comes down to Simon's word against the other boy's, Simon makes sure his case is warranted both by Sam, and by the reported authoritative voice of their headmaster.

As I mentioned earlier, this story becomes a focal point to refer back to in the interview (and presumably in other conversations). For instance, shortly after the exchanges transcribed above, Sam showed me some micros (miniature cars) which he has got from Simon and Simon remarked: 'He (*Sam*) bought them off me but I'm not the sort of person who wants to get them back'. The phrase 'get them back' echoes a similar phrase in the original story: 'his mum writ a letter saying can he have it back, right, so he got it back'. Again, the phrase in the original story 'he told his mum' is reinvoked when about twenty minutes later in the interview, Simon explains how another boy, Alan<sup>16</sup>, stole things from the shed which Simon and Sam were turning into a club house with shelves to exhibit all the animal bones they had found in the fields: 'the other day he (*Alan*) nicked two, a

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16 This is the same Alan as the egg smasher in Geoffrey's account. As he did not attend the schools in my study, I did not meet this boy, but he seemed to be an important local figure in a number of children's lives.

hammer, my two torches, my Sherwood stickers, there was this tray with four pockets in, he nicked my wallet, my wood and I went round his house, got the stuff and I wouldn't even tell his mum.' Like Lee and Geoffrey, Simon is presenting himself as a particular kind of person through contrasting his own actions with those of other people in a similar situation.

In the story above about getting grounded, Sam provides the abstract, and what could be a resolution or coda, for Simon's story, and he also contributes substantially to its evaluative function. This kind of collaboration, at both the structural and functional levels, was common in stories from the interviews. The next example shows two girls collaborating to produce the abstract, resolution and evaluation of a single narrative. It illustrates the more or less wholesale appropriation of another person's voice as if it were the child's own (this example is also referred to in Chapter Five). I had just asked Nicole (11 years) who else lived at her house and Karlie (12 years) mentioned that Nicole's sister Terri had recently had a baby:

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| Janet  | So does your sister live quite near you?                             |
| Nicole | She lives with us  |
| Karlle | Cause she's only quite young   |
| Nicole | She's young, she's sixteen   |
| Janet  | Ah right   |
| Karlle | She did the best thing about it, though,<br>didn't she, Nicole?      |
| Nicole | She didn't tell a soul, noone, that she was A<br>pregnant            |
| Karlle | Until she was due, when she got into<br>hospital, then she told them |

- Nicole      On Saturday night she had pains in her      O/C  
 stomach, and, come the following Sunday,  
 my mum was at work and my sister come  
 to the pub and my Aunt Ella was in it and  
 my sister went in there and said 'I've got  
 pains in my stomach!', so my aunt Ella  
 went and got my mum, and took her to  
 the hospital, and my mum asked her if  
 she was due on and she said 'No, I've just  
 come off', and  
 when they got her to hospital they said      R  
 'Take her to Maternity!' My mum was  
 crying.
- Janet      Your mum didn't realise she was  
 pregnant?
- Nicole      No, and my mum slept with her when she  
 was ill!
- Karlie      My dad said she did, Terri did the best      c  
 thing about it. Her sister's Terri.
- Nicole      Or if she did tell, as she's so young, she  
 weren't allowed to have him.

This story is actually introduced by Karlie's evaluation 'She did the best thing about it', before Nicole and Karlie together give the abstract of the story: 'She didn't tell a soul, no-one, that she was pregnant - until she got into hospital, then she told them'. As I have shown earlier, this kind of collaborative talk, where one child makes a comment and another provides a linking, complementary comment, occurs frequently throughout the data. Nicole then provides the orientation, combined closely with the complicating action, and finishes with the dramatic resolution 'Take her to maternity!'. (The fluency with which Nicole told this story and the phrase 'come the following Sunday' suggest that she has heard or told it before- it is the only story I collected which shows such signs of rehearsal). Nicole's mother's tears and the additional information 'and my mum slept with



her when she was ill' (ie and still didn't notice that she was pregnant) emphasise the shocking and extraordinary nature of the story, but it is Karlie again who repeats the overall evaluative point which also serves as a coda, bringing the story back to the point in the conversation where it had started: 'My dad said she did-Terri did the best thing about it' which Nicole then clarifies: 'Or if she did tell, as she's so young, she weren't allowed to have him'. As I pointed out in Chapter Five, although Karlie's evaluation which prompted the story was initially presented as her own, we now learn that it is in fact her father who has made this judgement. Karlie seems to have taken on her father's voice, and presented his judgement of Terri's actions, as if it were hers.

My final example of story-telling in the interviews comes from Michelle (11 years), whose fantasy narratives I discussed in Chapter Four. Like the other children I interviewed, Michelle and her friend Kim were concerned with people's rights, and the rules or agencies which might regulate their activities (the police, the head teacher, laws protecting birds and social services have all been referred to in the examples above). They talk for some time about Mrs. K., who they believe does not like them and 'can be nasty sometimes' (Michelle), but Kim explains her father has said he will come and slap the teacher for her, if there is any trouble. The conversation moves on to Kim's problems with psoriasis and Michelle says her mother has psoriasis because she is worried about Michelle's father, who left them six years previously when Michelle was five, but keeps coming back and 'he's allowed girlfriends but she's not allowed boyfriends'. Michelle then relates a number of stories about her father's behaviour, and her own role in the troubled relationship between her parents. While there are cohesive ties back to previous topics in the conversation, for

example the phrase 'he can be nasty when he wants to' echoes the discussion of the class teacher, ('she can be nasty sometimes'), this chain of stories about Michelle's parents also creates its own discursive space within which questions can be explored about Michelle's parents' relationship, each of their relationships with her, and the nature of rights between men and women (all questions which are important to Michelle's own emerging gendered identity). In the first extract below, she recounts one violent incident, where her father's toughness and violence are portrayed mainly through his dialogue, and the reactions of the neighbours who all, even the man who considers himself 'well hard', slink back into their houses. Interestingly, it is only Michelle herself who, in the story she tells, has the power to protect her mother.

- Janet            Why isn't she (*Michelle's mum*) allowed  
                    boyfriends?
- Michelle        He's jealous (K:laugh) you know you can get men  
                    jealous but they're allowed to go with someone else  
                    but if they find out their wife's got someone else  
                    and they've left.....
- Cause my mum- she, she had some boyfriends and  
                    he, he caught her out once and he done her really  
                    badly, smashed all the pipes in her stomach
- Janet            What, what, your dad?

- Michelle Cause he can be nasty when he wants to (...*brief anecdote of father's rude possessiveness..*) We've got a massive telly in our front room and all furniture we've got new and it, my mum run out once cause he whacked the phone right round her face- she just run out the back, so did I cause I'm more- I love my dad, I love them both but I'm close to my dad, but, if he lays a hand on her I'm on my mum's side, do you know what I mean? So I run out with her- and em, we- we sat down outside the front with Ann and all that (*laughs*) this man thought he was well hard, the other boys called him out the house, he sat out there, and when my dad come out and he (*dad*) goes 'You try to stick up for my wife, I'll have you all on', you know, beat 'em all up (*laughs*) and all the men walked in their house and shut the door. So my dad goes to my mum 'Right, see you later, I'm going to smash your telly' and he pretended to smash that he goes 'I'll see you later I'm going to smash your furniture in half' (*laughs*). And my mum was kind of going 'If you don't get in here I will do it' and all that. I said 'Mum, just go in there and I'll stay with ya' so I walked in there with them and he didn't touch her at all
- Kim He won't touch her with- if Michelle's there because
- Michelle Yes cause I'm his favourite
- Janet What about your brothers, do they go to stay with him?
- Michelle No, just me, Winston said 'I'm not staying with that old 'B'! (*laughter*)
- Janet So are they on your mum's side, really?
- Michelle Yea. But I like, I'm closest to my dad, like all girls mostly are, cause my mum's closer to her dad (*Michelle continues with a story about her mother's concern for Michelle's grandfather, who is now old and sick*)



'Cause he can be nasty when he wants to' abstracts the evaluative point both of the brief anecdote referred to in brackets in the transcript, and also of the account above which directly followed. Like Nicole's account of her sister's pregnancy, orientation and complication are interwoven here, leading to the final resolution 'so I walked in there with them and he didn't touch her at all'. Because of the complexity of Michelle's own role in the story, she steps outside it to make the external evaluative comment: 'I love my dad, I love them both but I'm close to my dad, but, if he lays a hand on her I'm on my mum's side, do you know what I mean?' As in many other examples, the narrator's friend collaborates in emphasising the evaluative point of the story at the end. Here, Kim supports Michelle's perspective and warrants both her account, and the evaluation. Stories told by friends are just as important a site for the exploration of values and perspectives as stories told by oneself, and they are also an opportunity for the reaffirmation of the friendship through confirming that the friends hold and express similar evaluative perspectives.

As in Karen's account of her intervention in the story about Tiny, Michelle presents herself as the person who has the power to resolve the situation- more power and courage, it would appear, than all her neighbours put together. This exploration of personal agency is perhaps more important than the precise referential 'truth' of the account. Michelle, however, is also aware of the limits of what she, or outside authorities, are able to do to help her mother:

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Janet    | So why does why do you think your dad -em goes for your mum- he just loses his temper? |
| Michelle | Yea, she gets  |
| Kim      | /Yea because I suppose he gets jealous, really   |

Michelle Cause he said to my mum 'It's alright me having girlfriends but you're not going to have noone in your life (K: laugh) except for me' and all that sort of thing (K: laugh) and once when she really got mad with him she said 'I want a divorce' and he, he he done his nut, he said 'I'm not divorcing you!' and he got hold of her hair and he whacked her right on the fence and the pavement and everything and she'd been getting pains in her stomach where he'd kicked her and in her head (hm) she kept going to the doctor's. But my dad can get nicked cause the doctor see all the bruises over her and he says 'Who's done this?' and he found out and it's on his records, you know they keep records, so he retyped it out again, she goes to the doctor's about crying all day with the bruises. He said that we'll go and get him done and she said 'Don't, don't' cause when he comes out here she doesn't want to do him any more cause she's really scared of him.

Janet So have you ever talked to your dad about em - that you don't like what he does to your mum?

Michelle (*Pause*) My mum says best not to, cause he might come round and say 'You've been getting at MY daughter to make me not touch you' but he said from now on he won't lay a hand on her, but that's a lie my mum said.

Again, the action and the characters are represented mainly through dialogue- Michelle's father's voice, her mother's and the doctor's. As in Simon's account of his head teacher in the Lego incident, Michelle also uses free indirect discourse (FID), (underlined below) where we can hear the character's voice behind the narrator's: 'she said 'Don't, don't' cause when he comes out here she doesn't want to do him any more cause she's really scared of him.' Toolan (1988) defines FID as containing no reporting clause (the example above is near but not directly connected to 'she said'), the use of third person pronoun for the speaker ('she' for Michelle's mother), proximal deictics as in direct

discourse ('here'), and prominent use of modality markers which emanate from a character rather than the narrator ('want to do him'). FID, often emotive, conveys the internal perspective of a particular character, thus constituting a switch in focalisation within the account. We see things at this point from the perspective of Michelle's mother. As Toolan points out (1988 p127), FID can be seen either as a substitutionary narrative, or combined discourse, or contamination, or dual voicing. He suggests it is an important strategy for temporary alignment, in words, value and perspective, of the narrator with a character. We can in fact see these switches in focalisation happening throughout the account above, not just in this example of FID, but also through Michelle's reproduction of her parents' voices, with their two conflicting perspectives which are finally set directly next to each other in the reported speech at the close of the account: 'but he said from now on he won't lay a hand on her, but that's a lie, my mum said'.

The fact that the FID example conveys Michelle's mother's perspective rather than her father's is significant. Although Michelle explicitly claims she is closer to her dad, and she obviously admires his power and toughness, the focalisation within what is ostensibly Michelle's own narrating voice in the stories is generally aligned with her mother rather than her father ('you know you can get men jealous but they're allowed to go with someone else but if they find out their wife's got someone else', 'he can be nasty when he wants to', 'I'm closest to my dad, like all girls mostly are, cause my mum's closer to her dad'). Orientation to social institutions like the doctor and prison is also close to her mother's perspective. Throughout these narrative accounts Michelle is negotiating her own gendered position, as she moves from childhood to adolescence, through exploring her agency



and alignment within a series of reported events. She is able to represent the different and conflicting perspectives which are involved in the development of her own future identity as a woman, through her reconstruction and juxtaposition of different people's voices, together with their encoding of particular evaluative viewpoints. She positions herself in relation to her parents' perspectives both through explicit statements, and through focalisation. The inconsistency between her stated closeness to her father, and her focal alignment with her mother, reflects the inherent conflict and ambiguity in the attachments and evaluations which contribute to her own emerging identity.

### 7.3 Anecdotes from the continuous recordings

Narratives from children's conversations with each other during the school day are usually briefer than the stories from the interviews, and more punchy. Children's stories to each other are often told within the context of fast moving exchanges and a competitive jostling for conversational space (especially among the boys), so narratives have to immediately grab and hold the audience's attention, and strategies involving the listener are more marked. Furthermore, when talking among themselves, children do not need to make things as explicit as in the interview, when they sometimes added explanations or clarification for my benefit, for example Karlie explained to me 'Terri did the best thing about it- her sister's Terri' and Michelle paraphrased what she meant to make it easier for me to understand: 'he goes "You try to stick up for my wife, I'll have you all on', you know, beat 'em all up". Because of the extensive shared knowledge and history between children, their stories can be more elliptical, and the intertextual references more complex. Whereas in the interviews I

could track cohesive ties within the forty-five minutes or so when I was talking to a particular pair of children, the stories children told each other could make implicit references to all kinds of previous stories and conversations which they had shared. Again, while the stories in the interviews grew out of the ongoing conversation between two children and myself, anecdotes told among the children themselves would sometimes emerge from a conversation, but at other times might be sparked off by a chance remark heard across the room, or by some activity in which children were engaged.

Stories reflect the context in which they are narrated, and always express something about the relationship between teller and audience; choosing to tell a story about a specific topic, with a particular evaluative slant, is part of the construction, development or challenging of this relationship. The stories children told each other had a greater diversity of functions than the interview narratives, reflecting the wider range of contexts, activities and relationships in which they were involved together. Narrative accounts were used to justify a particular argumentative point, to negotiate knowledge about social practices, as part of competitive self-presentations, and to amuse and entertain, as well as in the kind of exploratory evaluations of the self discussed above. Like the stories in the interviews, however, any performance usually fulfilled more than one evaluative function. And one aspect of evaluation, I would argue, is always concerned with personal identity, since any evaluation implies an authorial perspective.

I shall focus mainly on anecdotes told by two children: Julie (10 years) and Darren (12 years). Both Julie and Darren were lively, popular children, who could hold an audience and frequently used anecdotes to entertain their friends. I shall also include a couple of anecdotes

from Darren's friend Martie (11 years), since these two boys' anecdotes were often linked together in a series of exchanges. The examples I have chosen are representative of anecdotes generally in the continuous recordings of children's talk in terms of structural, dialogical and evaluative features, and the relationships between these, but they have a distinctive flavour, which I hope will become clear.

### Julie

As in the stories from the interviews, children use reported speech in the more fleeting anecdotes they tell each other, both to recreate events, and to convey the evaluative point they want to make. The use of prosodic features to create a particular kind of voice are often important to hold the attention of the audience, as well as to make a particular evaluative point. In the first example below, Julie creates a high pitched, baby's voice for her sister in this anecdote told to Kirsty while they were working together in class. Another child had just asked to borrow her eraser.

- Julie Right, this morning, right, my sister- my mum got my O  
 sister this little dressing table, right  
 and my sister didn't like it and she says (*baby voice*) C  
 'Julie, you got a rubber?' and I go 'yea' and I go 'yea'  
 and she goes 'Can I bowwow it?' and I goes 'What for?'  
 She goes 'I just want to bowwow it' and I go 'Alright,  
 here you are' and she goes errrrr like that (*makes*  
*rubbing out movement*). I found my rubber, it was  
 about that big- I ain't got it any more, it's absolutely  
 disappeared. I go 'Where's my rubber?'  
 She goes 'Don know, but I can't wub my desk out!' R  
 Kirsty Ah, isn't that sweet!



In order to elaborate the metalinguistic joke which plays on the meaning of 'rub out', Julie creates a high-pitched, phonologically immature baby voice. In the same way as Bakhtin describes the novelist's creation of dialogue for their characters, Julie's representation of her sister's speech combines the latter's voice with her own intentions as author of the story. Her sister's words, like the voices of Karen's parents' and Lee and Geoffrey's in the stories discussed above, are 'double voiced'; we can simultaneously hear what the character is saying, and also the author's voice behind it, constructing and animating their dialogue in particular ways (Bakhtin 1981).

Within Julie's joke, there could be various different evaluations of her sister's behaviour- as stupid, annoying, or cute and naive. The fact that it is the last interpretation which is picked up by Kirsty ('Ah, isn't that sweet!') does not mean that the others are not also potentially there and acknowledged by the girls. In addition, Julie's exaggerated caricature of a baby voice adds another potential level of irony to the account. But Kirsty's response suggests an evaluative function which links in with a recurring theme in the girls' talk. A couple of days previously when Julie produced a small model dog to swap at playtime she announced 'Me got this little dog to swap'. This use of baby talk seemed intended to convey the cuteness and vulnerability of the dog (hence increasing its swapping value) and her audience responded by exclaiming about the dog's 'sweetness' and offering to 'look after it'. In the data, the girls' use of expressions and voices which invite listeners to take on a nurturing role are invariably successful in obtaining an enthusiastic response. Particular gendered language practices appear to be a powerful marker of in-group solidarity in this area. Julie's anecdote is successful not just because of

its joke value, but also because it can be interpreted as plugging into this powerful discourse of 'mothering' that is found within girls' talk. Children's stories in ongoing conversations with each other are often clearly dialogically structured, with a more complicated involvement of different layers of audience, than in the interview. Julie related the next story below while she was sitting at lunch with David, a boy in whom she has a special interest and was frequently trying to impress, as we have seen in extracts quoted earlier. Several other children seated nearby were also listening. These other children had just been discussing an incident in the cloakroom where one pupil had kicked another, and been punched in return. While Julie is speaking ostensibly to David, she is also aware of this wider audience (which fall somewhere between Goffman's ratified listeners, and unofficial bystanders (Goffman 1981)). (cf Julie's use of the wider audience in her pick pocketing interaction with David, in Chapter Five).

Julie      Right, the other day when my mum went to go and O  
                  hit me, right,  
                  my next door neighbour was coming in and my      C  
                  mum went like that (*swipes in the air*) and I  
                  ducked and my next door neighbour went 'Aaaagh',  
                  she's only five,  
                  and my mum went 'phew!', she went 'Oh sorry,      R  
                  Michelle!'

David      Did your mum hit you?

Julie      No, I ran, straight away. I ran all the way down to      R2  
                  the bottom street and back.

The abstract and orientation are conflated here ('Right, the other day when my mum went to go and hit me'); as Julie keys into the theme of the other children's discussion of the cloakroom incident, she can assume that both David and her wider audience perceive the

connection, and gets quickly into the main complicating action which as usual is related largely through dialogue. She initially ends the story in a slightly ambiguous manner but in answer to David's question provides a clearer resolution. Like many of the other stories told by Julie, this one is about thwarting and subverting adult authority. To increase the shock value within the story, she delays giving her audience a significant piece of information (that Michelle is only five) until after telling them that her mother has hit a neighbour. The delayed information is typical of Julie's style of picaresque, slapstick humour: she subverts her own story and her audience's shocked reaction by slipping it in to render her mother's action less reprehensible, and turns what could have been a serious incident into a joke.

This story is coherent on its own terms, and it is also a response to the conversation about the cloakroom fight. In addition to this immediate context, David and the other children listening will also be reminded of Julie's other picaresque tales about her relations with adults; and, in particular, of other stories about her mother. Just before lunch, for instance, Julie was sitting in class with Kirsty and Sharon, while they were finishing off some work together. The girls had just been discussing their anxiety about the amount of swearing on the tapes I was collecting:



Julie Children aren't meant to swear

Kirsty If people swear at them, they can swear back  
(*brief pause*)

Julie I swore at my mum the other day because she started,  
she hit me

Kirsty What did you do?

Julie I swore at my mum, I says 'I'm packing my cases and I  
don't care what you say' and she goes 'Ooh?' and ( *I go*)  
'yea!'. I'm really cheeky to my mother.

Julie's stories often involve parents or teachers using physical force (for example her mother slapping Michelle, Mr Clayson beating her), and I would suggest that, as is also the case for Karen and Michelle, the discursive function of Julie's stories, at the point at which they are told, may be more significant than their truth function. In other words, the evaluative point being made is more important than the story's referential accuracy.

Although we can see elements of narrative structure here, for example the deictic 'the other day' signalling the beginning of a story, and the use of dialogue and the present tense ('I says') to convey complicating action, this seems to be a relatively underdeveloped narrative. However, the use of reported speech, even in an anecdote as brief as this, can provide a rich site for exploring alternative viewpoints in relation to personal identity. The anecdote creates a kind of discursive space, held together by its narrative features, within which to explore two themes. The first is Julie's relationship with her mother, which is related to the more general issue, for these 10-12 year olds, of their changing relationships with adults who are no longer seen as unquestionable authorities. In terms of this theme, the anecdote invokes links with other stories Julie has told, both about her mother and about standing up to adults generally. The second theme is the issue in Julie and Kirsty's previous exchange, that is,

whether and when it is justifiable for children to swear. In this context Julie's mother hitting her acts as a kind of putative example: 'Do you mean that something like this is a sufficient provocation for a child swearing?', Julie seems to be asking Kirsty. In relation to this theme the story emerges not so much from either one of the two previous utterances, as from the dialogic relationship between them. The ambiguity of evaluation through the focal switch within the story, where Julie shows herself justified and yet still 'cheeky', nicely reflects the dialogue between the two contrasting evaluative positions in her own and Kirsty's two previous comments, that is, Kirsty's 'if people swear at them they can swear back', and Julie's 'children aren't meant to swear'. 'Children aren't meant to swear', with its authorial distancing in the use of 'children' rather than 'we' sounds like an authoritative adult's voice, and an adult's perspective, a perspective Julie seems to return to in her final evaluative comment 'I'm really cheeky to my mother'. Within the anecdote, however, Julie creates a confident, assertive and defiant voice for herself. Even when her mother challenges her she remains steadfast ('yea!'). The dialogue between the authoritative adult voices and the voice of the speaking subject Julie creates for herself in the exchange she reports nicely illustrates Bakhtin's account of the struggle between authoritative and inwardly persuasive dialogue which he sees being fought out at every level within language, right down to the individual utterance (see Chapter Two). This struggle is particularly explicit for many of the children at this point in their lives, as they appropriate some adult voices and evaluative viewpoints, and contest others, in moving from childhood into adolescence.

In addition to creating a particular kind of voice for herself within the anecdote, Julie uses the formulaic phrase 'I'm packing my cases', to

invoke a scenario which will be recognisable to Kirsty, and to all those familiar with soap-operas and neighbourhood gossip (cf Terry's 'I feel like just going "Right. I'm leaving!"' when his mother is not home at lunch time). Its connotations of family break-up and the end of close relationships underline the extremity of the crisis between Julie and her mother, a crisis within which it seems justifiable for Julie to swear.

The two themes, relationships with adults and when it is appropriate to swear, are brought together in an anecdote which shows Julie trying out her own personal power. Like David, Kirsty will hear and interpret this anecdote not just as a turn in their current conversation, but in the context of other anecdotes with similar themes. The creation of their own voice, and of themselves as a speaking subject, is particularly interesting within children's stories like these, in revealing the dialogic construction of identity. The apparent inconsistency in evaluative perspective between Julie's different utterances in the anecdote about swearing at her mother is explained if we see the speaking subject here not as a consistent 'self' expressed within individual utterances, but rather as being provisionally constructed through the dialogic relationships between the different voices she invokes.

While narrative is used to recreate a dispute in the last two stories above, in the next example Julie uses a brief narrative actually within a dispute about swapping with another child; this time, the story is a turn within an argument, presenting a scenario which justifies Julie's position. Although swapping had been banned in the school, it was still a highly popular clandestine activity. This argument occurred in the playground during the morning break:



Ellie Why won't you swap?

Julie Well I swapped yesterday with you, but you come and

Ellie I didn't want to

Julie /Right cause I swapped with you yesterday (.....) A

Ellie I didn't want  
to

Julie /Yes you goes 'Let's have the dog, then' and you gave O  
me out your hand lotion and you went 'Black Jack, can't  
swap back'<sup>17</sup> and all the rest of it,

and then as soon as you got to calling 'Are you coming?', C  
hunted for me and you said that you wanted the lotion  
back.

So I took the dog back, you took the hand lotion back. R

The main action, as in other narratives, is recreated largely through dialogue, and the dialogue here is a particularly significant part of the story's overall evaluative point because it is what Ellie said (or what Julie claims she said) which proves that a swap did in fact take place, which Ellie later revoked. It is the language act itself which accomplishes the transaction. If, as Ellie now claims, she had not wanted to swap, then she should not have have taken part in the ritual dialogue 'Black Jack, can't swap back'.

I have shown that in terms of internal coherence, Julie's anecdotes are held together in a similar narrative structure to the more lengthy stories from the interviews. They also use framing, deixis, reported dialogue and sometimes the present tense to draw the listener in, and increase impact and involvement. Whereas in the interviews I showed

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<sup>17</sup> The Opies (1959) record a number of traditional sayings to clinch swapping transactions, from various parts of Britain and in some cases dating back to the nineteenth century. Many involve touching black, leather, wood or iron to seal a transaction. Another version of the rhyme used in Camdean was 'Touch black, can't swap back'. This was usually accompanied by touching your shoe, even when this was not black. (Shoes are of course often made of leather, and in the last century children's boots would have had an iron heel). 'Black Jack' refers to the devil.

the links between a child's story and other stories and talk in that same interview, I have drawn above on the continuous recordings of children's informal talk with each other to show that their stories have a number of evaluative functions both in the context of the immediate conversation, and also in their links to the themes and concerns of other stories, and of other conversations. I have suggested that these links are invoked particularly through the children's reproduction of voices, for instance the baby voice for Julie's sister and her own voice in the argument with her mother. I have also claimed that children's own identities are being explored and negotiated through their reconstruction of their own voice, and of their dialogues with others. I shall explore this point further in the discussion of the boys' stories, below.

### **Darren and Martie**

Darren and Martie belong to the most dominant group of boys in the class, and exchanges within this group often involved a competitive jostling for the conversational floor, frequently with an audience extending beyond the group to other children in the class- girls whom they want to impress, or other boys hanging around the fringes of the group, like Geoffrey and Philip in the extracts below. The boys tended to throw in points of information or rudimentary anecdotes in a rapid exchange until one gained the floor for a more extended turn. The examples below are all typical of this general pattern.

The first example comes from children's talk during the fifteen minute coach journey to their once weekly swimming lesson. During the journey, the children's talk ranged around various journeys they had made. While the themes of their stories linked with the conversational

context (a coach journey), these narratives also provided a space to explore various other issues as well.

Here, after two competing turns from Geoffrey and Martie, Darren captures the floor to tell an anecdote about speeding on the back of a motor bike:

Geoff     Martie, Martie, listen, up Bailey's Bridge there's a hill, right, and you're supposed to go slow down it, it goes like this- I done about a hundred miles per hour down that and you go- whoops!

Martie My dad goes, my dad goes, and when it does down like that and up like that and goes like that (b: yea) and my dad was doing a hundred and thirty down there and we were going  $\uparrow$ (...)

Darren                                  L You know that roundabout                                  O  
down Dilford (b: yea) you know Dilford, you know  
Dilford, where the Lion Hotel at the end (b: yea) that  
roundabout straight on from there, yea, they've got  
that railway thing (b: yea) right there's a massive  
bridge behind there, in't there

Girl /my mum told us about that there

Darren We was, I was on the back of a motor bike, yea, right C  
and Mick was on the front, right, and he goes (*motor*  
*bike sound*) and he went (*more motor bike sound*)  
and I was going (*frightened voice*) 'Oh mmmmm'.  
When he stopped I was nearly crying, man, it was so R  
scary, I thought we was going to fall off!

Martie My dad, my dad, my dad's getting a new escort,  
a white escort

Boy      ↳ We use to have an escort

It is important to the impact of Darren's story that his audience knows exactly which stretch of road he is talking about; it includes a railway level crossing and a number of complicated intersections, making it a particularly dangerous place for speeding. So there is quite a long orientation section, where Darren sustains the attention of his



audience partly through interrogatives ('you know', 'in't there'), and also because of his reputation as a good story teller, and his dominant position in the class. Darren's anecdotes are often about portraying his daring and prestigious exploits; in a situation where children are swapping experiences, he will often provide the most striking and impressive story. The evaluative point of his stories, which reflect and sustain his social dominance in the class, emerges in relation to other preceding stories, for example here in relation to Martie's and Geoffrey's accounts of speeding. It retrospectively devalues the impact of these experiences, in relation to his own. Thus in order to judge the meaning and value of this particular account we need to look at its context within the boys' previous conversation leading up to this point.

In a situation where it is almost impossible for the complicating action to include reported speech, Darren still constructs it as a kind of dialogue: 'he goes (*motor bike sound*) and he went (*more motor bike sound*) and I was going (*frightened voice*) 'Oh mmmmm'.' In the next example, from later in the same coach journey, Martie also constructs the complicating action of another anecdote through a kind of non-verbal dialogue, between an air hostess's high pitched imitation of a car horn, and his own deep throated engine noise. Darren and Martie are swapping their experiences of being on an aeroplane with other children sitting nearby.

Martie Do you like getting off the seat?

Darren No

Martie I love getting off the seat.

A

I was sitting in the middle of the floor and reading  
a book and the hostess come O

Darren /I did that once

Martie /And the hostess come, and she said, she was, she C  
 was REALLY nice if you know what I mean, and  
 as she came past she had this trolley with all the  
 dinners on it and she went (*high pitched 'neep*  
*neep' horn sound, laughter*) and all I done is, I went  
 (*low pitched sound of car engine*) and  
 I moved to the side as she went past. (*groan*) Her R  
 legs, man (*groan, short pause*) .  
 I was going to eat the dinners, man. C

Boy Chicken

Darren /And you can leave what you want

Martie's external evaluative comment 'she was, she was REALLY nice if you know what I mean' underlines one point of the story- the attractions of the air hostess and, more significantly, Martie's positioning of himself in relation to these, not just literally on the floor where he can get a good view of her legs, but also as a male who responds to this view with enthusiasm. Martie's story is successful here partly because, like Julie's story about the eraser, it plugs into a powerful gendered discourse, this time a male discourse about fancying attractive females. But the shifting nature of the evaluation also nicely illustrates these boys' transitional identity, between childhood and adolescence. This is a stage where they can play on the floor like a child but look up air hostesses' skirts, and where physical attractions can be discussed in the same breath as the meals on the plane, and a child's delight that you do not have to eat all the food on your plate. Even the dialogue between the horn and the engine noise can be interpreted in two alternative ways, either as a child's game, or as a flirtatious joke. The comment 'I was going to eat the dinners, man', which could be both a coda and the start of a new story, again shifts the interest, away from the hostess's legs and onto what she has on her trolley.

The next example, which comes from talk in the boys' changing room as they are getting ready to swim, shows a similar competitive jostling for the floor, but in this context Martie and Darren collaborate to produce an anecdote together. Again, the topic of the talk (diving) is connected to its context (a swimming pool changing room). The anecdote also provides a space to explore the recurring theme of who can successfully accomplish the most daring feats of physical courage and prowess. Here this is presented not as a direct personal boast, but through the ridiculing of an opponent. There are about eight boys getting changed together. This extract comes a few moments before Martie and Darren's conversation about G-force, which is discussed in Chapter Six, p.195).

Martie Who was here when we went with Miss, Miss

Darren Russell?

Boys Me, I was

Martie I was, I was

Em did you, em, what about the way Keith dived?

Boys Yea

Darren What about Scott, man

A

Martie Right Scott was, Scott was going (*exaggerated voice*)

O

'I'm cool, man, I'm going to dive', right, and he is standing

Darren /And he goes to the edge, right, yea, and he just goes splat. There's the white, he just goes bang on his tummy, come out and

C

he had all red marks all over him, man. That was well bad

R

Martie /Er you know when we first had to dive in, me and him scraped our tummies- you said you did

Here, although Martie initially introduces the subject of memorable dives, Darren takes the floor from him with the abstract 'What about Scott, man'. Martie attempts to recapture it with the orientation 'Right



Scott was, Scott was going (*exaggerated voice*) 'I'm cool, man, I'm going to dive', right, and he is standing', but Darren cuts in and retakes the floor for the complicating action (unusually not conveyed in dialogue), resolution ('he had all red marks all over him, man') and final evaluative remark 'That was well bad'. (An alternative reading would be to see just the final comment as the resolution). This seems like a kind of competitive collaboration (cf the example in on p219), where the two boys complete an anecdote together, while simultaneously struggling to each take the centre stage. The voice Martie constructs for Scott, 'I'm cool, man', is an example of the kind of generic dialogue children use as a sort of short hand to invoke a particular kind of familiar context (in this case someone showing off), like Julie's 'I'm packing my cases' and Terry's 'Come on you c.u.n.t.' and all that'. The exaggerated reproduction of the voice signals Darren's evaluative purpose; we can hear Darren's irony behind Scott's boast, and the scene is set for Scott's humiliating downfall.

Although the anecdotes from Darren and Martie discussed so far have all involved a construction of some part of the anecdote in dialogue, (the complicating action in three cases), they have not used reported speech to the extent which I documented in Julie's stories, and in the stories from the interviews. I want to look now at a final anecdote from Darren which is constructed almost entirely through reported speech, and where Darren, like Julie in 'Swearing at mum', manipulates a number of different discursive layers in constructing the speaking subject in the story. Darren is telling this anecdote to other children queuing next to him in the school playground, waiting to go in to lunch. There is always a lot of noise and milling about in the queue, and anecdotes told in this context need to be extremely

arresting and lively in order to hold their audience. At this point, one child has just sworn at another.

Martie I said that to a real man and he went, he went 'dick head' [*and I went*] 'of course I am!' (*laughter*) And he goes 'erm!' (*growling and laughter*)

Darren This man called me a fucking bastard, right, O  
I go 'back to you', he goes 'come here', I go 'come on, C  
then' and he's got about size ten trainers and he  
chased me, right, and then when he got, he caught  
me, right, like that, and he goes 'who's fucking  
saying?' And I goes 'fuck off', I says 'fuck off' and  
he goes, he goes, 'Do you want a fight?'  
I go (*falsetto voice*) 'not tonight, darling' and he R  
goes 'piss off!'

Within this anecdote Darren, like Julie, uses reported dialogue to tell his story, and display his own courage and defiance in standing up to an aggressive adult (the evaluative aside 'and he's got about size ten trainers' emphasises the man's size and therefore by implication, Darren's bravery). But Darren does not just create voices for himself and the man. He also, inside the story at the point when things are getting really alarming, portrays himself as taking on a different voice again: ('not tonight, darling'). Darren adopts a slightly higher pitched voice at this point, portraying what could be either a woman or a homosexual man who is rejecting a partner's advances. The use of this voice and phrase invokes a particular scenario or scenarios with associated relationships, in the same way as other formulaic phrases discussed earlier above. In Darren's case, calling up this particular speech genre changes the relationship between himself and the man in a way which defuses the situation through humour and signals a kind of submission which still enables him to maintain face rather more successfully than Martie did in his story in the previous

conversational turn. This is Darren's internal intention, as it were, within the context of the anecdote. There is also his intention as a speaker who is following and hoping to decisively cap Martie's contribution, and the manufacture of voices within Darren's anecdote also contributes towards this conversational aim.

As in 'Swearing at mum', Darren's anecdote opens up the possibility for constructing meanings through the relationships between the different conversational layers, and through the links these make with the themes and voices of other contexts, and with the speakers' previous conversational history. In the boys' conversations, as I have shown, they often seem to be jostling for position, capping each other's comments with a more impressive contribution. Here, Darren's story is a response to Martie's rather abbreviated anecdote. It is more developed, the man is more frightening, and the turnaround at the end more dramatic and ingenious. As well as providing a turn in the immediate conversation, it also contributes to the recurring theme in the boys' talk concerning their toughness and canniness, which are important aspects of the way they present themselves to each other. And it echoes the concern of Julie's anecdote about how far adult authority can and should be contested.

## 7.4 Conclusion

While Labovian narrative theory illuminates many aspects of the structural coherence of conversational narratives and their evaluative functions, it does not address the important dialogical evaluative links between stories and their conversational and social contexts, nor does it explore in any depth the central role of reported speech in narrative evaluation. In this chapter, I have drawn on the ideas from



Bakhtin/Volosinov, and from the ethnography of communication, which are discussed in Chapter Two, to develop an analytic and research frame which can handle these more complex and dynamic processes in children's use of conversational narrative.

I have shown that the topics of the stories are often closely related to the context of the speech event, for instance stories about travel told in the coach, the size 10 trainers anecdote told in the context of altercations in the dinner queue, and 'Swearing at mum' sparked off by the research context of taping children's talk. The anecdotes are intricately embedded in the ongoing conversational context; and, in terms of theme, they may create a kind of discursive space within which to explore the topic of a previous exchange in the conversation (eg 'Black Jack', 'Swearing at mum' ). Or they may offer a response to a chance remark heard from another conversation ('The misplaced slap'), or relate tangentially to activity within which children are engaged ('Rubbing out'). In terms of social function within the immediate context, I have shown that Darren's and Martie's anecdotes often function as competitive attempts to gain the conversational floor and consolidate their dominant social positions within the class, while Julie (who also uses stories to gain the floor) relates 'The misplaced slap' to entertain and impress David, and uses the 'Black Jack' narrative to prove a point in an argument with Ellie.

As part of ongoing conversation, the anecdotes are intensely dialogic, that is, orientated towards listeners and previous conversational turns. In addition to interactional markers (the use of interrogatives, 'right', the boys' solidarity term 'man'), the opening and closing sections of the stories are structured in relation to the previous conversational exchange, and the perceived currently shared conversation context. Thus the abstract and orientation sections are

sometimes conflated, and at the end of stories, near the boundaries with the next speaker's turn, there is frequently structural ambiguity, reflecting the importance of the listener's response in corroborating or reshaping both the structural features, and the evaluative function of the narrative (for example my request to Geoffrey for another resolution in the story about the stray cat, Kirsty's evaluative contribution in 'Rubbing out' and Karlie's in the account of Nicole's sister's pregnancy). Specific uses of language may convey an attitude towards another speaker (for instance, Lee's echoing of both the theme and structure of Geoffrey's story reflects social and moral alignment), or invoke a gendered discourse which carries shared values important to the point of the story (for example Julie's use of a baby voice for her sister in 'Rubbing out'). Because of the collaborative negotiation of evaluation, and the children's use of narrative as a space for exploring different evaluative perspectives, the evaluative function of stories in my data seems ambiguous and unsettled; issues are explored and negotiated rather than resolved.

While the stories have a dialogic function within the current conversation, they also set up intertextual connections with other stories, and other conversations. The dialogue in an anecdote creates an additional conversational layer within which a particular theme can be explored in more depth, often through exploring the relationship between different evaluative perspectives invoked by different voices. These voices generate their own additional resonances and themes, and create new dialogic relationships between the voices invoked in the anecdote, and voices from other stories and conversations (Volosinov 1983, Bakhtin 1986). As I suggested in discussing 'Swearing at Mum', apparent inconsistencies in the evaluative perspectives children take on are explained if we see the

speaking subject not as a consistent 'self' expressed within individual utterances, but rather as being provisionally constructed across conversations and through the dialogic relationships between the different voices invoked. This more process-focused view of the speaking subject is consistent with Shotter's points (1993) about Vygotsky's process-focused conception of the relationship between words and thoughts: 'words cannot be put on by thought like a ready-made garment' (Vygotsky 1986 p219), instead there has to be a constant back and forth checking and changing, both through inner speech, and through dialogue where the possible interpretations of others involve more checking and reshaping. Shotter suggests that since our thoughts do not have an orderly form before they are realised, and their realisation involves constant revisions and recontextualisations, we cannot locate our mental activities at the centre of ourselves, but rather through our continuing responses to others, to the contexts within which we find ourselves, and to what has already been internalised. He quotes Bakhtin: 'The very being of man, both internal and external, is a profound communication. To be means to communicate....Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary' (Bakhtin 1984 p287 quoted by Shotter p110). In a similar way, I would argue that in the anecdotes and stories involving reported speech, the speaking subject is being constructed on the boundaries, or, as I would prefer to put it, through the dialogic relationships between, on the one hand, the speaker's intentions and those of listeners or other voices for whom the utterance is a response, and, on the other, among the various voices invoked, and their associated contextual connotations.

Stories have to be recognised as 'tellable', and in addition to being appropriate for a specific context they reflect the issues which are



important for a particular social group. In the examples I have discussed, we can see children grappling with accounts of human relationships, moral issues about care and cruelty, and their own gendered identity. Individual stories have resonances with longer term concerns and issues which crop up again and again in children's conversations, so that in the broader context of what Halliday calls the context of culture, the anecdotes function in what could be termed a 'long conversation' between children concerning various aspects of the business of moving from childhood into adolescence in a particular cultural setting. In both the interviews and in their own ongoing conversations, children's stories present and explore various aspects of their own emerging identities and agency, often through contrasting themselves with others. Stories also explore the ambiguities and inconsistencies in adult behaviour and values, and the broader regulatory functions of various social institutions. Their toughness, their new gendered identities, their changing relations with adults, are all recurring themes which are explored collaboratively by children, so that the construction of the identity of a speaking subject is very much an ongoing, negotiated process. These 'long conversations' are carried on in different contexts across days and weeks as children return again and again to the themes which are important to them, revisiting the issues in different stories and exchanges and from different perspectives. Thus the recursive and iterative process of collaborative meaning-making between children is carried on at and between three different but interrelated dialogic levels: through the dialogues they reconstruct within the stories, through the conversational exchanges from which the stories emerge, and through their 'long conversations' across space and time.

## Chapter Eight: Literacy practices

### 8.1 Introduction: researching literacy in use

In this chapter I document a range of literacy practices I recorded among the 10-12 year-olds in my study, and analyse a number of literacy events in more detail, to show how these serve to construct forms of knowledge and to constitute identities.

The basis for my own approach to researching literacy in the classroom is described in Chapter Two, where I discussed how within the ethnography of communication tradition, literacy is seen as embedded within social process. Thus context shapes the referential meaning of a particular text, and also its pragmatic meaning- how it can be used to accomplish particular social or practical ends (Hymes 1977). The unit of analysis is then not a text, but a literacy event, defined by Heath (1983), after Anderson, Teale and Estrada (1980) as 'any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role'. The argument is that literacy is closely embedded within oral language, events having social interactional rules regulating how and when to talk about what is read (Heath 1983 p. 386). Thus, Basso (1991) suggests that instead of research focusing on writing systems, writing should be studied as a communicative activity, and that we should be looking at the other kinds of activities it is associated with: the types of setting in which writing takes place, the information considered appropriate for transmission through written channels, who sends messages to whom, when, and for what reason, and the range of

cultural meanings attached to writing as an activity (that is, how it is seen in relation to art, pleasure, intellectual development and so on). I have explained why, although some writers in the field have more recently used the term 'literacy practices' to refer at a theoretical level to the shared mental constructs which direct people's behaviour in literacy events (Barton 1991, Street 1995), I myself have found it useful to use this term at a more empirical level, to refer to those patterns which emerge in children's use of language across different literacy events. I also discussed in Chapter Two how within Hallidayan systemic linguistics, certain aspects of context and social practice are theorised as evident within the actual structures and vocabulary of language use. Thus Halliday's notions of tenor and field make social relationships and the social and cultural context an integral part of the text structure and meaning in both writing and reading. Building on Halliday's work, educational research within the Australian genre school defines genre not in terms of a particular style of text, but as 'a goal-directed social process' (Martin et al 1985). In Chapter Four, I explained my own use of the term 'genre' as drawing on ideas from Halliday and Bakhtin to include the text medium(s) (for example spoken, written, visual, kinaesthetic), the way language is used (for example vocabulary and grammatical forms, phonology, text presentation), type of content, and the relationship between the producer(s) and audience(s). As in my use of the term 'literacy practices', I focus on that aspect of the term which refers to an empirically evidenced level of description and analysis. I use the term 'discourse', as I explained in Chapter Two, to refer to the broader complex of conceptions, classification and language use which organises the use and meaning of the more specific language and literacy practices.



Both the ethnographers of communication and education researchers in the Australian genre school have been interested in identifying social rules (for example how children are taught to interact with different kinds of print in a specific social group, how the powerful genres within a society are structured) and tend to focus on individual agency in a particular cultural context. They have been less concerned with theorising the interaction between the individual and social practice, or the implications of power in relation to conflict and change. In Chapter Two I discussed how some linguists and anthropologists have now begun to focus on these issues, using poststructuralist ideas which suggest more distributed and dynamic notions of self and of cultural values. For instance Street (1994) argues that because all literacy practices are embedded in social activities, they always entail a relationship of power, and this may be contested in various ways. Drawing on anthropological literature about the concept of the person in different cultural settings, Street suggests that people express rather different facets of their personality, and their humanity, through different literacy practices.

Critics have made a number of points in arguing that both genre theory and the ethnography of communication approach underplay issues of power. Threadgold (1993) highlighted the relationships of power which are encoded within particular texts and their associated practices, for instance the positioning of women within legal genres and within canonical English Literature. Learning to engage in these genres and practices will not necessarily be empowering to those encoded in less powerful positions within them. On the other hand, Luke (1996) also criticises micro sociological and social constructivist models (for example ethnography of communication, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism), claiming they focus on

local intersubjective negotiation of texts and knowledge without providing an account for why some discourses, knowledges and texts 'count' more than others. Luke uses Bakhtin and Volosinov's ideas about the ideological nature of language use, and the struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces, and Foucault's notion of discourse, to repoliticise Halliday's concepts of tenor and field (and mode, I would suggest). He argues that while within education Freirean, genre and personal growth pedagogies of reading instruction often refer to the empowerment of learners, writers here mistakenly reify power by investing it in particular genres, texts, skills, abilities and competencies. It is more revealing, Luke suggests, to take Foucault's position that power does not reside in a particular genre, or a particular skill, but is 'multicircuited' 'exercised from innumerable points' and tied up with a 'multiplicity of force relations...through ceaseless struggles and confrontations' (quoted in Luke op cit p325). Thus power relations around literacy in the classroom can be exercised in many subtle ways through rituals, practices and discourse and we need to reframe text as 'social strategy historically related in a network of power relations in particular institutional sites and cultural fields' (Luke op cit p333, cf Street 1996).

My own focus, like the ethnographers of communication, is on the function and the meaning of literacy events and literacy practices for the children in my research. But I shall also draw on poststructuralist and constructivist ideas about texts, agency and power in analysing how they contribute to children's construction of knowledge and identity. My data includes observation and audio recordings of events where children interact with various kinds of written text and recordings of them talking about the text, or about the activity, to each other, to the teacher, and to myself. I also have children's reports

to me about their uses of writing outside the curriculum, from the interviews (see Appendix 2). In this chapter I examine how children participate in different kinds of literacy activities, and how the social and cultural meanings around different sorts of social activity shape their experience of written texts. I shall describe how children's reading and writing is tied up with expressing and pursuing various aspects of social relationships, and suggest how their various practices express and construct aspects of their changing identity as they move from childhood into adolescence. I shall argue that while Foucault's ideas can be applied to produce a rather top-down view of power in classroom literacy, as Luke (1992 and 1996) seems to do despite his emphasis on multiple force relations, they also provide scope for examining the dynamic and multicircuited aspects of power around specific uses of text. A close analysis of both 'official' and 'unofficial' literacy events in my data reveals a complex mix of relations of power, in relation to different contextual and intertextual settings.

Although my research is not longitudinal, and so cannot provide a diachronic social analysis, I take Vygotsky's position that learning involves the internalisation of social dialogue, so that children's talk with each other and with the teacher can be viewed as a sort of social thought, which is then internalised and may contribute to future individual knowledge and activity. I show that ideas and perceptions generated within talk about texts, or about literacy, can be used later by children to inform their future actions, and interactions.

Although my data for this chapter comes mainly from the classroom, I explained in Chapter Three that my research is framed rather differently from most studies of classroom language, which tend to be underpinned by pedagogical criteria, and educationally institutionalised notions of competence. My attempt to adopt an emic



perspective runs counter, in particular, to the conceptions of literacy which are so central to most discussions of curriculum and learning. Within the field of language and learning it is often difficult to disentangle conceptions of 'literacy' and 'schooling', since literacy is often conceptualised simply in terms of educational competencies or practices: what Street and Street (1991) call the 'pedagogisation of literacy'. While research shows that experience in particular kinds of literacy practices helps educational success (Scribner and Cole 1981, Heath 1983), there is a tendency to define literacy just in terms of those practices, even when documenting children's experience at home (for example Wells 1986). Literacy is often conflated with skills and knowledge, as in the expression 'computer literacy' and knowledge and skills are usually defined in relation to particular institutionalised competencies in school or the workplace. Thus interpretation of the notion of 'competence' turns out to be a list of 'competencies' rather than a resource for social use (Dubin 1989). Although these dominant paradigms of literacy and knowledge are an important part of the context of classroom literacy events, organising participants' orientation towards them, an ethnographic approach reveals that there are also other perspectives from which these events can be viewed. I shall show in this chapter that while some aspects of literacy are closely tied up with the institutional organisation of space, time, knowledge and activity (and help to construct these), literacy events in the classroom also involve a wide range of texts, strategies and relationships that contribute in different ways to the construction of knowledge (in the broadest sense) and identities. In addition, many strategies and genres developed in the classroom are appropriated by children for use in activities outside the school curriculum. In analysing the different activities around official and unofficial literacy

events, I shall demonstrate how, in each case, issues of context, intertextuality and collaboration shape the function and meaning of children's language practices.

## 8.2 The role of the worksheet in managing time, space, knowledge and activity

Foucault argues that the power of the state is diffused through institutions which discipline people into particular kinds of subjects through their management of time and space, and that these institutions also promulgate discourses which position people and construct particular kinds of knowledge as truth (see discussion in Chapter Two). In this sense, an education system maintains or modifies the appropriation of discourses, and the power and knowledge they carry. In this section I shall look at how the management of literacy activities in the classroom, especially around worksheets, also manages time, space and knowledge in particular ways, and will later below focus on the discourses promoted through worksheet use. Although Foucault's theory allows little scope for personal agency, I shall suggest that the multicircuited nature of institutional power creates opportunities not only for its resistance, but also for its appropriation by children for other personal goals.

The two classrooms where I did my research had many organisational features in common. I shall begin by focusing on Lakeside, the main study school, and will draw in examples from Camdean where appropriate. While there were many examples of efforts at explicit top-down control in the schools, for example when the teacher reprimanded the whole class about some aspect of their behaviour, institutional power was also more subtly diffused throughout the way

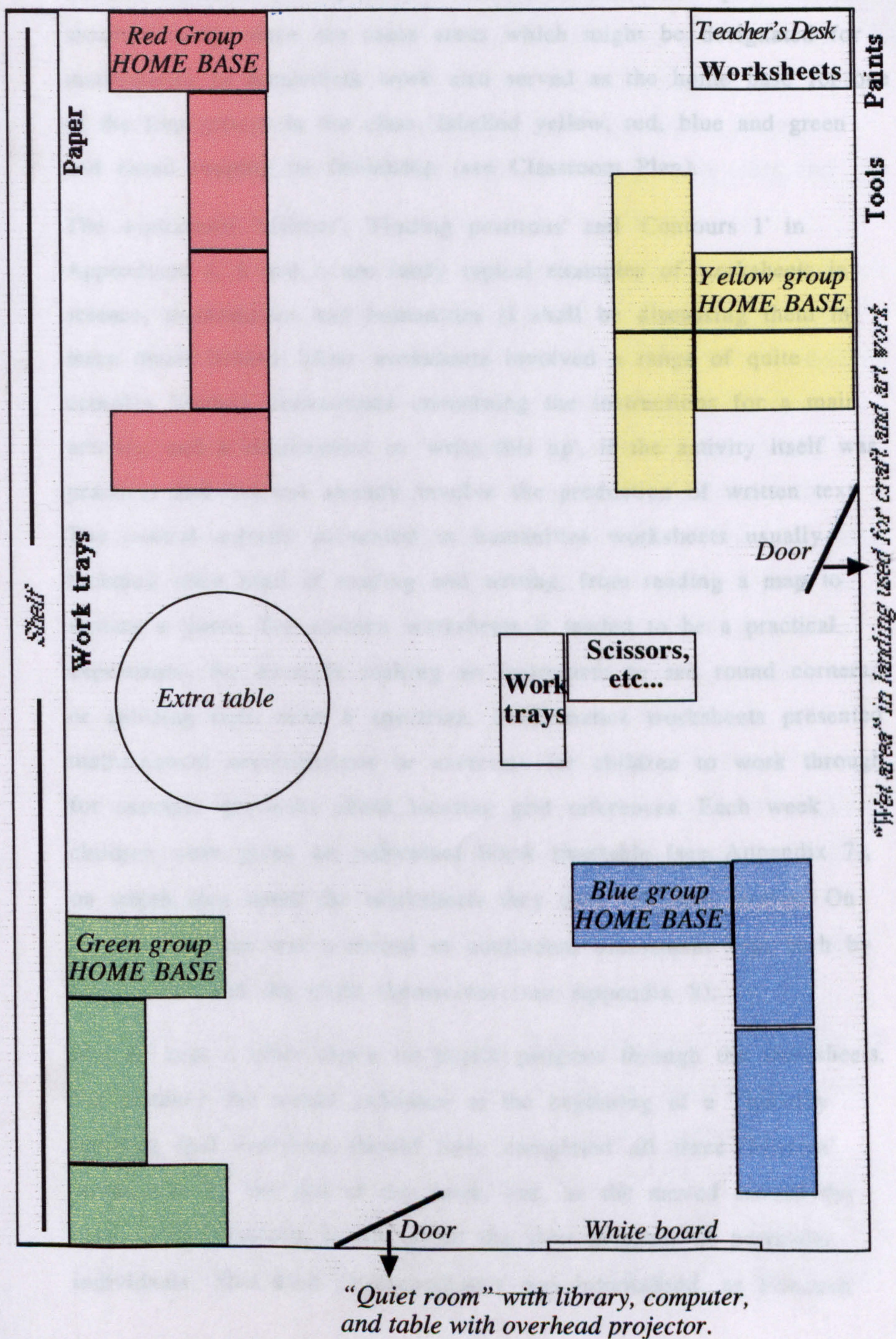
the whole day was organised. In Lakeside, children had designated sessions for assembly, physical activities and French, but they spent the large part of each day working through a graded series of worksheets in each of three main stipulated knowledge areas: mathematics, humanities and science. For each of the four daily timetabled sessions (two in the morning and two in the afternoon) children chose a particular curriculum area and sat to do the appropriate worksheets in the classroom area designated on that day by the teacher. Thus, for instance, she might announce one day that the red group home base would be used for mathematics, the yellow for science and the green and blue for humanities. (See Classroom Plan on next page). Children had to spend at least one of the four daily timetabled sessions on each of these three curriculum areas; they could choose which order to work on them, and which to continue on for the fourth session.

There were no bells during the day, no set times for 'mathematics' or 'science'. Instead, it was the worksheets that told children what to do and when, and organised their activities into sequences and phases in different areas of the classroom; for example they might need to carry out an experiment, or interview another child, and then write up a report. As I shall show in more detail later in the chapter, for the teacher and the children, knowledge was located within the text of the worksheet, and around the procedures which it instructed children to carry out.

In the classroom, therefore, children's experience was officially framed by a symbolic equation linking time, space, knowledge and activity: one timetabled session= half the morning or half the afternoon= a specific set of tables within the room= a particular curriculum area= a set of worksheets organising activity. In fact



Plan of the classroom showing points most visited by children to collect equipment needed for literacy activities





children operated two symbolic divisions of classroom space simultaneously, since the same areas which might be designated for mathematics or humanities work also served as the home base for one of the four groups in the class, labelled yellow, red, blue and green and based roughly on friendship (see Classroom Plan).

The worksheets 'Mirrors', 'Finding positions' and 'Contours 1' in Appendices 4, 5 and 6 are fairly typical examples of worksheets in science, mathematics and humanities (I shall be discussing them in more detail below). Most worksheets involved a range of quite complex literacy conventions concerning the instructions for a main activity, and a requirement to 'write this up', if the activity itself was practical and did not already involve the production of written text. The central activity presented in humanities worksheets usually included some kind of reading and writing, from reading a map to writing a poem. For science worksheets it tended to be a practical experiment, for example making an instrument to see round corners, or splitting light with a spectrum. Mathematics worksheets presented mathematical investigations or exercises for children to work through, for example questions about locating grid references. Each week children were given an individual blank timetable (see Appendix 7), on which they noted the worksheets they used for each session. On the back of this was a record of continuous assessment kept both by the teacher and the child themselves (see Appendix 8).

Mrs K. kept a close check on pupils' progress through the worksheets. For instance she would announce at the beginning of a Thursday morning that everyone should have completed all three 'Mirrors' worksheets by the end of the week, and, as she moved around the class, would exclaim loudly about the slow progress of particular individuals. This kind of surveillance was internalised, as Foucault

(1979) suggests, by the children themselves who frequently checked their own progress against others: 'Are you still only on "Contours 1"? I've nearly finished "Contours 2"'. But it was also appropriated within personal social goals, as friends often paced themselves through worksheets together, so that they could sit next to each other and work collaboratively.

Each day at Lakeside began with the teacher addressing the whole class, checking overall progress through the worksheets, explaining organisational matters (for example 'If the maths table is full, then what do you do? You choose a different area to start with') and admonishing the children to work hard. There were then usually about ten minutes of noisy upheaval as children negotiated with friends about what they were going to in each session 'First I'm going to do my "Contours 2", then my "Coordinates"', claimed a seat at the curriculum area table where they wanted to start work, and moved about the classroom collecting pens, paper, worksheets, and any other special equipment which the worksheet activity demanded. In Foucault's terms, the children were institutionally disciplined through enclosure in the space of the classroom, and allocation to 'functional sites' (ie specific tables) designated according to a particular method of managing knowledge (the curriculum), time (the four daily sessions) and activity (the worksheets). Foucault argues that in their serialisation and segmentation of time institutions try fill it up completely, so that there will be no opportunity for unaccountable or unofficial activity. Thus children not working on allotted worksheet tasks were told they were 'wasting time', and the teacher often admonished them about how little time there was left to get the rest of their work finished. However, as we shall see in the course of this chapter, within the officially allocated time children also found ways



of pursuing their own purposes, and of transforming time and activity in various ways.

In addition to exerting power over individuals through the control of time, Foucault (1979) argues that institutions control individual movement, and discipline the relationship between bodies and objects, to varying degrees. The worksheet activities managed pupils' movements by placing them in a particular area of the classroom and stipulating which other areas they could move into, for example the 'wet area' outside the door if an activity involved painting or sticking, or the 'quiet room' for an experiment with the overhead projector. Once Mrs K. knew which worksheet a pupil was working on she could quickly spot any unauthorised movement. However, many pupils were adept at covering their wandering around the classroom and visits to friends with official activities like looking for a ruler or fetching paper. Informal contacts could be brief and fleeting; for example, while Kevin and Kieran were working together on their mathematics problem (discussed in detail later below), Tom stopped at their table and greeted Kevin 'All right, Kevin?' before passing on, much as one friend would greet another in the street, or in the school refectory. Although brief, I would suggest this contact was socially significant for the boys involved, particularly as Tom was a member of the most dominant group of boys in the class, and Kevin was not.

As the classroom plan shows, the 'hot points' in the classroom, which contained the equipment children needed for literacy activities, were well distributed around the area. While this was designed to prevent disorder from crowding in particular places, it also meant that children could usually find a reason for visiting any particular part of the room. In addition, pupils were sometimes told by the teacher to pin completed work up on the wall, next to the appropriate

curriculum area, which again legitimated movement to collect drawing pins, find a space on the wall, and so on. And of course there was also 'going to the toilet' which was more or less regulated according to how tightly the teacher felt she needed to control the class on a particular day.

In terms of relating to physical objects, these children had already passed the stage of being taught how to hold their bodies when sitting at a desk and how to grip writing implements as part of their bodily inscription as 'literate' (Luke 1992). I would suggest that literacy disciplining (both in the sense of inculcation into a genre, and institutional control) for the children I observed was carried out largely through their involvement in the reading and writing activities stipulated by the worksheets. Enacting these in line with school procedural conventions not only carried children through time and space in a way that enabled them to be controlled, ranked and classified (largely through the 'writing up' of their work) but this enactment also served to define and authenticate particular ways of relating to texts and taking meaning, and particular ways of displaying knowledge through the production of text (cf Street and Street 1991). The worksheets' pivotal role in the conception and organisation of time, space, activity and knowledge within the classroom was borne home to me when, at the end of three weeks of collecting continuous recordings in the classroom, I played extracts from my tapes to the whole class (with their prior permission), and invited them to guess what was happening in each recording. Somewhat to my own and their teacher's surprise children immediately and accurately identified each extract, however brief (and some were somewhat off task), according to the worksheet which the speakers were using, for example 'It's Martie and Karen on 'Light

Three!'. For the teacher and I, the children in the recording might be making a rainbow by shining light from the overhead projector bulb through a prism (or learning about the constituent colours of the spectrum), but for the pupils themselves, they were 'doing Light 3'. The worksheet title for them represented 'what was happening', and they seemed to need only the slightest of clues to match these titles to the talk recorded on the tape.

I want to move on now to look at how particular language and literacy practices within the classroom serve to produce institutionally validated procedures, texts and knowledges, but how they also constitute sites of negotiation and struggle with other kinds of procedures and knowledge, in relation to social interaction, and the construction of identity.

### 8.3 The importance of procedure and product

A large proportion of talk in the classroom, both between teacher and pupils and also among the pupils themselves, was about procedures—how to organise their work, how to carry out activities and how to produce the piece of text that each worksheet demanded. This emphasis on procedure has been seen by other researchers looking at classroom language as problematic in terms of educational goals. For instance, Bloome (1992) suggests that rather than actually engaging with curriculum knowledge teachers and students often go through a kind of 'procedural display' of 'doing learning' and 'doing literacy' in a collusive compromise that enables them to give the appearance of fulfilling their institutional roles without too much effort or conflict. And Edwards and Mercer (1987) warn of the dangers of pupils acquiring 'ritual' rather than 'principled' knowledge, because they are



learning how to follow certain procedures without grasping the conceptual understanding which teachers had intended would be the result of such activities. In fact Piagetian theory, which underlies the organisation of child-centred activity learning in the classrooms where I did my research, privileges procedure in stressing that children need to discover knowledge for themselves rather than be told it directly and explicitly; this is one reason why following the instructions for activities is so vital (children need to do the right things to 'discover' specific bits of curriculum knowledge), and the writing up of work is so important (it provides evidence of whether or not particular kinds of knowledge and concepts have been acquired). There is also a specific cultural value in British education attached to 'writing up', as opposed, for instance, to the importance attached in France to oral report. So in this sense the emphasis on procedure is inevitable: children are being taught how to engage in particular kinds of schooled literacy practices. In Foucault's terms, too, procedure is all important, because of its role in the institutional disciplining of children.

In the recordings teachers talk far more about the importance of correct procedures and of obtaining a finished product, than about the details of the content of the texts produced by children. For instance, Mrs K. stresses to the class that what is important to display in assembly is a 'properly', 'nicely', 'finished' product.

Mrs.K. I don't mind what you do, as long, and I repeat this quite properly, as long as you let me see what you intend to read out, and you have it properly and nicely, and you've evaluated everything properly, and you've thought about it. If there is something you particularly want to do, and you know you've got to work on it, well get it finished.

In Camdean, Mr. Gorman asks pupils to introduce a character and write about it. He explains: 'The idea is we have a finished product'. And in asking pupils to carry out follow-up work after a reading from 'The Silver Sword', Julie's class teacher says: 'I want something to go on the wall by lunch time'. When introducing the scavenging hunt to the class, she invokes particular school literacy conventions (writing headings, labelling items) as correct procedure:

Miss P. What we'll be looking at is not only that you've collected everything, but the people, the group who do the best display of work. So you need to write each heading on your piece of paper, you need to stick labels on by each thing, so we know what it is. We'd like to put some up on the wall'. (*There was a parent/teacher meeting at the school that evening*).

Pupils had internalised the relationship between 'finishing' a piece of work, doing it 'properly', and using the time allocated within the curriculum and, like other aspects of the institutional system, could turn this to serve their own social goals. In the example below Julie, who is working together with Kirsty and Sharon in mounting their findings from the scavenging hunt, draws on this knowledge to put down another pupil, who claims that her group has already finished.

Julie	We've almost finished
Pupil	So have we
Julie	You ain't finished
Kirsty	Some people have already finished!
Sharon	Yea, look, they've finished!
Julie	( <i>To pupil claiming to have finished</i> ) What's that? You never took your time on yours!

On the one hand, Julie's remark 'You never took your time on yours!' could be seen as internalised surveillance, but on the other hand it represents a use of procedural knowledge to exercise power over others. Through this kind of appropriation, power becomes multicircuited.

Knowledge of procedural conventions is a major source of teacher authority in both schools. In Lakeside, for instance, there is a slightly uneasy power relationship between Mrs. K. and a group of three boys, Gary, Darren and Tom whom she has just joined at the computer in the quiet room. The boys are working out a program for drawing a face, using Logo (they have to produce a list of commands which when keyed into the computer, will produce the drawing). They are rather more confident at the computer than Mrs. K., and a couple of times she defers to their judgement over what the next command should be. However, she exerts her own procedural authority in dictating how the boys should record the instructions for their programme in writing:

Mrs. K. Who is making notes?

Gary      We are, we've got it all here

Mrs. K. But you're not making notes, you're not doing it

[illegible]

Mrs. K. No you're not. Right, because obviously if you were it would have come out right. So you want to take your 'pen up'

Gary /That's what we

Mrs. K. /Right, now work out everything in exact detail

Darren      Right ninety

Mrs. K. Right

Although Gary challenges Mrs K. over what counts as 'making notes' he concedes that she has the power, within the classroom, to set such



definitions. Through invoking her procedural expertise and conflating 'making notes' with 'making notes in a particular way', Mrs. K. is able to reassert her institutional authority in a situation where it seems to be threatened by pupil expertise.

#### 8.4 The genres of classroom texts, and the discourses of their use

I want to now look at the worksheets themselves, and the procedures which they entailed. Understanding the instructions on a worksheet often involved quite complex knowledge about particular literacy conventions. For instance, 'Mirror 1' (see Appendix 4) includes the instruction: 'Can you design an instrument to see over/under/around? Draw your design on scrap paper first. Show the measurements. Show how you will fix it together. Make a list of what you will need.' Here children need to know that the initial question is in fact an instruction to design such an instrument, that their instrument could see *either* over, under or around (not all three), what counted as scrap paper, whether 'first' implies they need to do the design again on non-scrap paper, and what conventions they should use for marking measurements. They also need to know whether they should 'show how you will fix it together' on the same design, or through a different set of designs, how they should represent actions diagrammatically, and whether they should also include written instructions.

Many teacher-pupil interactions in Lakeside involved Mrs. K. mediating worksheet instructions for children, and moving them from a discourse of personal experience into an educational discourse including particular curricular generic conventions (cf Wertsch 1991). In the extract below, Mrs. K. is teaching Karen how she should respond

to the first instruction on the worksheet 'Contours 1' (see Appendix 6) 'Look carefully at the three pictures overleaf. Read the descriptions very carefully'. She starts by asking Karen to identify which of the pictures is a map:

Mrs. K. Right Karen, where's your Contours One?

Karen My Contours One? It's in my folder, Miss. It should be in here. There it is, Miss.

Mrs. K. Now which one would be the map view? If you were making a map of the area

Karen /That one

Mrs. K. You'd take it to be that one. Now in this particular one, what's so very different about this one in comparison to those two? What do you definitely see in those two, that you haven't got here?

Karen You can see the hills in there but you can't in there

Mrs. K. Yes, what's the- you can see the h...

Karen Em...

Mrs. K. You can see the HEIGHT. Can you understand what I'm saying?

Karen Yea

Mrs. K. So these two pictures will show you there's some height there. This picture doesn't show you any height at all. Now if you were making a map of this, and you wanted to put it on a map, how do you let people know there's height there? (pause) Now this is what THIS sheet is all about. Right? Now, now this is taking the first hill. Take the first hill, right, now they have drawn a li - that's ground level there

Karen m m

Mrs. K. Right? They've drawn another line there, that's ten metres,  
twenty, thirty, forty, fifty metres

Karen Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty

As in most of her teaching interactions, Mrs. K., who talks for most of the time, uses questions to mediate the worksheet text. She leads

Karen through a procedure where real world knowledge is mediated by the first picture of a hill, through the second aerial view and finally transformed into the literacy conventions of the map. Mrs. K. inducts her into a particular way of reading a set of pictures; the first two show 'hills' as Karen states, reformulated as 'height' by Mrs. K. which, she initially suggests, is not shown by the third 'picture', the map. The map of course does also show height through the use of contour lines, which Karen knows as she explains to Mrs. K. shortly after the above exchange that they show 'how steep it is', but Karen has to set aside this knowledge until it is prompted by Mrs. K.

Karen has to learn to recognise particular kinds of labels and headings; for instance, Mrs K. does not say the diagrams show how high the hills are, but uses the nominalisation 'height'<sup>18</sup>. As well as concentrating on the detail of particular 'ways of seeing', and the introduction of specific terms, Mrs. K. makes the overarching comment: 'How do you let people know height is there? Now this is what this sheet (*ie the map*) is all about'. The repeated 'this' marks the deictic centre from where all perceptions, and conceptions of the text will emanate. So Mrs. K. is modelling an engagement with the worksheet text which includes choosing the appropriate frame (Goffman 1974) for all activity on it, identifying and labelling items from the printed and visual text according to their significance within this frame, and

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<sup>18</sup> Halliday (1987) suggests that written English typically contains a higher proportion of nominalisations (*ie* the replacing of a verb phrase by a noun), than spoken English. Nominalisations serve to make a text more lexically dense, with fewer and simpler grammatical items than speech. While Street would question Halliday's argument that speech and writing in general have evolved in these different ways to fulfill different functions (Street 1995 p4), I would suggest that the features Halliday identifies are typical of the specific kind of written English found in the language of many classroom worksheets and textbooks, and are used in oral language by teachers and children who invoke these literate 'voices'. Thus we can trace some aspects of the interpenetration of oral and literate genres in specific educational discourses.



moving Karen from the discourse of personal experience ('hills') to the discourse of educational knowledge ('height').

We can see this shift between discourses happening again when Mrs. K. moves on later to the instruction on the worksheet 'Use an atlas. Look at the contours on a physical map. See if you can work out some different heights.' Again, she tries to introduce terms which have precise, curriculum related meanings, for example 'sea-level', and the reformulation of Karen's term 'beach' into 'coast' and then 'coastline':

- Mrs. K. Now we've got to use an atlas and we use what they call,  
em
- Karen /Eh, look at this (*points to different shadings of contour levels*)
- Mrs. K. Can you see how it's done out?
- Karen Yea
- Mrs. K. You see, so, nought there, that's on SEA LEVEL. And where do you think you're going to find that mostly? Round the what?
- Karen Round the
- Mrs.K. Where do the land and the sea meet? What's that called?
- Karen On the beach
- Mrs. K. Yea, on the COAST
- Karen Yea
- Mrs. K. On the COASTLINE. Now, in this particular place where we're looking at, we can see the very steepest bits are here.

Although Karen's role in this context appears to be that of a particularly compliant apprentice, this is only one kind of classroom literacy event, and I shall show children taking much more active and varied roles in subsequent examples below. First, however, I want to make two more points about the way children in my research were encouraged, and endeavoured, to take on educational discourses. The first point concerns how these discourses marked particular kinds of

knowledge as valid, and not others, and how they positioned children in relation to the authoritative knowledge (as we can see Karen is, as an inexperienced apprentice, in the example above). The second point is that, as I argued in Chapter Five, one of the important ways in which children learn to speak and write educational discourses is through appropriating the voices of their teachers from actual dialogues and from verbally mediated interactions with written texts. In Vygotskian terms, the taking on of the voice of a teacher, textbook or worksheet, represents a stage between the original dialogue, and the internalisation of educational dialogue which children may use to direct future actions in the classroom. We can see Karen's voice repeating and merging with Mrs. K.'s voice in the first extract above, and, in next example below, Martie and Mrs. K.'s voices repeat and overlap each other (an extract from this was discussed as an example of asymmetric collaboration in Chapter Six). Mrs K. is checking how Martie and Karen are getting on with their worksheet on light. They had earlier carried out an experiment (as instructed by the worksheet) which involved shining light from the overhead projector through a prism which split the rays into their constituent colours, producing a 'rainbow' on a piece of paper placed beneath.

Mrs. K. What it boils down to, you've read this, haven't you?

Martie Yea

Karen /Yea

Mrs. K. Can you tell me how a rainbow is formed?

Martie Em er

Mrs. K. a a (*stopping a nearby child from doing something*) what two things do you need to make a spectrum?

Martie The rain and the su..light

Mrs..K. [ No, no, what two things do you need to make a spectrum? What have I got in my hand here?

Martie A prism

Mrs. K. Prism, and what's this going to  
 Martie └ A projector  
 Mrs. K. /Yea well what does  
 Martie └ Light  
 Karen /Sunlight  
 Mrs. K. Light  
 Martie Light  
 Mrs. K. Right, so when you see a rainbow in the sky, which is a  
 spectrum in the sky, yes? (yes) How, what is the light?  
 Where does the light come from?  
 Martie Sunlight  
 Karen Sunlight  
 Mrs. K. And where do the prisms  
 Martie The rain  
 Mrs. K. The raindrops  
 Martie Drops  
 Karen The raindrops  
 Mrs. K. So you get hundreds and hundreds of little prisms which  
 are the raindrops └ right  
 Martie └ Which creates this big  
 Mrs. K. And because they're not they all join together └ to give  
 Martie └ To make this  
 big rainbow  
 Mrs. K. To give this big rainbow cause you will not get a rainbow  
 in the sky if it's just raining, and you won't get a rainbow  
 in the sky if it's └ just sunny  
 Martie └ Just sunny

The dialogue between Martie and Mrs. K. is a dialogue between two different kinds of discourse which frame knowledge in different ways. Martie initially interprets Mrs. K.'s question as relating to common sense phenomena, where a rainbow is made from rain and sunlight. (He in fact answers her first question 'How is a rainbow formed?', rather than her rephrased version 'What two things do you need to make a spectrum?'). Mrs. K., however, intends her question to relate to a specific classroom activity, so the correct answer is not rain and



sunlight, but a prism and a projector. The rainbow she is referring to is not the one children have seen in the sky, but the one they have produced by directing light from an overhead projector through a plastic prism. The equipment around which this knowledge is organised belongs to the school. In fact, the day had started with a dressing down by Mrs. K. about the fact that the prism was missing from its box:

Mrs. K. Alright, put your pencils down. I want my prism back.  
 I'm getting fed up with this.....I want the person who's got my prism to come forwards.....I mean this is an expensive piece of equipment, I mean it's not even mine.

The ownership of the prism is removed progressively further away from the children as Mrs. K. talks - first it belongs to her, then to an unidentified other, to whom she and therefore they seem to be answerable. And in the transcript above, knowledge is located first around the school equipment, and only then applied to the outside world. From Mrs. K.'s point of view, she is demonstrating that the rainbow outside is one particular instance of light rays being split into their constitutive colours as they pass through a prism. For the children, however, it may be another instance where in order to acquire curriculum knowledge, they have to abandon common sense knowledge, or somehow translate it into a different framework, (as Karen had to with the pictures of hills) which is controlled by the teacher, and emanates from school owned equipment to which they are allowed restricted and tightly controlled access. The equipment, and perhaps the knowledge, is loaned to them on certain conditions. Thus, taking on a scientific discourse, where a rainbow is classified and labelled as one example of a spectrum, and a raindrop as a prism,

also involves being positioned in a particular way in relation to institutionally authorised 'truth'.

There were other kinds of knowledge which children were negotiating around this experiment, which are not referred to in their dialogues with Mrs. K. For instance, while they were experimenting with the projector and the prism, Martie showed Karen how, if you look straight at the light in the projector, and then close your eyes, you can see different colours. As they played about with the projector and prism, they found they could direct the spectrum in different directions, so it 'looks like a jellyfish' on the wall (Martie), or appeared in the mouth of another pupil, who pretended to eat it; they also managed to produce two spectrums simultaneously, in different parts of the room. Two boys nearby explained to Martie and Karen how they had tried an additional experiment with the projector the day before, holding pieces of white and black paper in turn close to the projector bulb until they started to smoulder, and concluding that black paper ignited more quickly than white. I am not suggesting that these kind of spontaneous and fragmentary activities have greater potential for effective learning than the dialogue about making rainbows; rather, that educational discourse selects from a range of activities and different kinds of knowledge being negotiated in the classroom, and constructs the nature of the authoritative knowledge and children's relationships to it, thus exemplifying Foucault's argument about the intertwining of truth, knowledge, power and subjectivity within discourse.

I have suggested that children take on the genres of science, geography and so on through appropriating the voice of the teacher. They also, as I showed in Chapter Five, take on, or try to take on, the voices of worksheets and other texts. The next example shows this

particularly clearly, when Julie tries rather unsuccessfully to appropriate the language of a written text in her oral explanation to me of what she had been learning about in her language class. Part of her response was a retelling from the story of 'Journey into Badly Dreamt', which the class listened to on a radio broadcast each week. During the previous day, the children had been given a printed synopsis of Episode Five, which included the following text:

'The children try to stop Panatopolis crying, so that the water will subside. Then Billy, laughing at one of his own jokes, falls into the water. This makes Panatopolis laugh and the water level starts going down till it is low enough for our heroes to ford the river. Half way across, they realise that Panatopolis is laughing so much that he is now crying again. Billy gets his foot trapped between some rocks and the water level starts to rise again...'

In her oral retelling of the story to me, one day later, Julie starts by adopting the exact phrasing of the written synopsis. She cannot however sustain this genre for long in the context of an oral account, and ends up switching between close paraphrases of the written text, and her oral recounting of its content. (Underlined phrases are close paraphrases of the original written ones).

Julie Billy laughing at one of his own jokes, he fell into the river, and that made Panatopolis laugh. And he got out, and the more angrier Billy came, the more Panatopolis laughed. They started to cross the river quickly, but Billy's foot got stuck in the, em, stone and just as his foot got stuck in a stone, they realised that Panatopolis was cr-laughing so much that he started to cry and the river started overflowing and then it stopped at the really bit where if he's going to drown.



In contrast to children's spontaneous oral narratives with their frequent use of dialogue and switches into present tense (see Chapter Seven), Julie here uses no direct speech and the past tense throughout (although the written synopsis itself is, unusually, in the present tense). Constructions like 'laughing at one of his own jokes, he fell into the river' and 'just as his foot got stuck in a stone, they realised that Panatopolis was cr- laughing so much that he started to cry', are more typical of written rather than spoken English (Halliday 1987).

However, Julie's interjection of the word 'he' after her first clause, before 'fell' is an additional cohesive feature acknowledging the oral context; this 'he' helps her to hang onto the thread of the story, and her listeners to follow it. 'The more angrier Billy came, the more Panatopolis laughed' echoes a common structure in children's folktales (though not in the written synopsis), and her final switch to a metalevel comment about the structure of the episode acknowledges a generic feature of broadcast serialised stories (ie episodes always stop at a cliff-hanger). Thus we can see Julie using a mixture of genres: written folktales, oral recounting, and metalevel generic comment. Rather than knitting these smoothly together, however, she switches uncertainly between them, so that the voice of the written text is fractured through its embedding in oral language, and her syntax breaks down altogether in the final metalevel comment.

From the examples above, it would seem that the genres of classroom texts are closely embedded within educational discourses, and thus linked to subjectivities and knowledge which these discourses encode; hence, perhaps, Julie's difficulty in reproducing a genre in the context of her informal interview with me. In my interviews with the children, however, they described many instances where they drew intertextual links between generic formats in school and out of school

contexts or where they had appropriated genres from the classroom for their own non-curriculum purposes. Apart from their frequent use of writing for personal letters, notes, diaries, copying out songs, letter games and graffiti, children also used genres more directly similar to those in the classroom, in writing stories, rhymes, poems, making lists and charts, and drawing cartoons and pictures (cf Shuman 1986, Camitta 1993) (see Appendix 2). For instance, Geoffrey says that whenever he is bored at home he goes upstairs and draws birds 'like in Miss Clark's class'. Terry uses a chart to record a list of the cars that he has worked on, and the parts he has fixed on each. He explained to me in his interview: 'It's just like a normal grid....it's just like a register'. Although it is not certain whether Terry is modelling his grid on a classroom text (like the worksheet 'Finding positions' in Appendix 5) or the car manuals which he told me he often read at home, he still perceives an appropriate generic connection which can clarify things for me, comparing his chart with the names on cars on one axis and their parts on the other, with ticks in the relevant cells, to the classroom register with its vertical list of children's names, horizontal list of dates, and similar use of ticks.

Some of the pupils' private texts invoked intertextual connections with the classroom and school, through their appropriation of particular voices. For instance, Melissa and Laura's list of rules for their secret club (see Appendix 3), which they started drawing up one evening at home, and finished off together in school the next day, includes two school rules that Mrs. K. had discussed with the class the previous week: 'No staying in during playtime', and 'No throwing your food at lunch time'. The appropriation of these rules for a private personal text expresses a certain amount of commitment to school authority, and its related pupil subjectivities. Similarly, Melissa and

Laura express commitment to certain social conventions: 'No swearing', 'No (sic) not lie or cheat', '...you must always use your manors (sic)'. The remaining rules relate to children's own friendship conventions (for example 'No useing' (sic)), except for their very first rule 'No smoking' which, while readily available as a model in the girls' environment, had particular significance for them personally, as they told me that although other children in the class smoked, and one of their mothers did, they were never, ever going to touch a cigarette themselves. While the expression of identity through contrast with others (cf Miller et al 1992), is clearest in relation to their discussion about this particular rule, the whole document could be seen as contrasting the behaviour of club members with the implied transgressions of non-members. At the same time, it expresses and consolidates the friendship between Melissa and Laura (emphasised in the repeated use of 'our' in their list heading).

## 8.5 Practices around literacy events

The three examples above of talk around school texts, Mrs. K. working with Karen on Contours 1 and discussing how rainbows are made with Karen and Martie, and Julie's account of her language lesson to me, all involve children talking about a text directly to an adult over a relatively short period of time. As I suggested earlier, classroom literacy activities involved a much broader range of strategies and relationships than these kind of examples would suggest, and I shall now look at a number of different events.

Children's talk around worksheets often involved discussion of what particular instructions might mean. It also, as the next extract shows, involves identifying which sheets of instructions or exercises count as



a specific worksheet, since these were not always clearly labelled. Kevin and Kieran are sitting at the maths table opposite two older girls Tina and Louise, for the first session after morning assembly on a Wednesday morning. Kevin and Kieran are trying to identify the sheets which correspond to 'Co-ordinates Stage 4 TB 17-19' listed as the second item in the 'Activity' column on their Activity Record Sheet (Appendix 8). The sheets they need are in fact entitled 'Finding positions' (Appendix 5).

- Kieran *(Rustle of papers)* What were them? Coordinates or Probability? How come?
- Kevin Look in your worksheet and see what page we're at, again
- Kieran Yea alright, go and get your worksheet  
*(10 secs)*
- Kevin *(coming back)* seventeen and nineteen
- Mrs. K. *(to whole class)* Anybody got a Light Two sheet?
- Kevin No, we've got to do Probability
- Kieran Or Coordinates, we ain't done that yet
- Louise This is Coordinates
- Kieran That? No it ain't. *(to Tina)* Is that Coordinates?
- Tina What?
- Kieran Is that Coordinates?
- Tina Yea
- Louise Yea, that's seventeen and eighteen, seventeen and eighteen, nineteen here *(points to page numbers)*
- Kieran What's that?
- Tina *(exasperated)* Coordinates! That one, that one and that one
- Kevin Put it on your worksheet, *[* anyway, Kieran
- Kieran *]* It only says seventeen and nineteen
- Louise It says *[* seventeen TO nineteen
- Tina *]* seventeen TO nineteen yea
- Kieran Oh
- Tina You silly wally!
- Kieran *(imitates)* You silly wally *(he and Kev brief laugh)*
- Kevin We don't need this *(pushing paper away)*

Kieran I know  
 Tina Yes you do!  
 Kevin No we don't  
 Tina What are you going to write it down on? Your head?  
 Kieran Yep  
 Kevin Paper

Although Kevin and Kieran are not particularly friendly with Tina and Louise, who belong to the oldest, most dominant group of girls in the class, because they are all sitting together at the maths table, the girls constitute part of the group resources into which the two younger boys can tap, for help. This help is unofficial; it is not 'scaffolding' (Bruner 1985, Edwards and Mercer 1997) where a teacher or more able peer gives clues or asks leading questions so a child can extend their understanding, and it is given in a fairly dismissive way ('You silly wally! .....What are you going to write it down on, your head?'). But the knowledge that 'Finding positions' is the coordinates worksheet, and that '17-19' means pages 17, 18 and 19 rather than just pages 17 and 19 is vital to the boys' understanding of what they have got to do. And although they accept the girls' advice, they manage to deflect the way it is positioning them, by imitating and laughing at the phrase 'You silly wally'. This kind of unofficial help was vital in enabling the classroom organisation to run smoothly; Mrs K. could only work with a few children at once, and many others would have been completely stuck if they had not been able to call on help from each other. Yet the way this help was given was very different from the 'teacher help', the boys received later (see below). Once Kevin and Kieran have identified the Coordinates worksheet as 'Finding positions' (Appendix 5), they are still at a loss as to what they actually have to do. Kevin says: "Don't know what we have to do. Ask Miss." Kieran says 'We have to try and write it. (5 secs) You have to

make it a grid. How to get to all the things. Look.' And he started reading from the worksheet: 'This is a plan of the zoo'. The two boys then try to work out the answer to the first question, which asks what they would find at C3. The correct answer should be 'tigers' but Kevin thinks the answer should also include the bushes which are in fact located in A3 and B3. He asks 'Do you have to write that down?' At this point they attract Mrs. K.'s attention, and she comes over and explains what they have to do. Although this is a more jointly managed interaction than many between teacher and pupils, it still contrasts with the way the girls offered help a few minutes before; for instance, Mrs. K. phrases her 'help' in terms of questions, and she uses the opportunity (as she did with Karen and Martie above) to introduce specialist curriculum language, ie the terms 'column', 'vertical' (extending the boys' 'downwards'), 'row' and 'horizontal'.

Mrs. K. Which, where, which way do columns go?

Kieran Downwards

Kevin Downwards

Mrs. K. Or upwards. Yea, OK, vertically. Right (Kier: yea). The rows, which way do the rows go?

Kieran That way, Miss

Mrs. K. Horizontally, right

Kieran You have to, em, find these, Miss, got to

Mrs. K. /Right so you

Kieran /got to see through and you go and see through so you end up

Kevin } tigers and the bushes, Miss

Mrs. K. Well, no, what is actually in this, where is the, that's the 'C'

Kieran And there's the three

Mrs. K. And the three. So it's where they join. Actually inside that square. Where they actually join. Cause this is B three

Kieran So this one is tigers



Mrs. K.                      And this is A three, so you just write 'tigers'.

Yea?

Here Mrs. K. explains the convention that a coordinate reference indicates the picture 'actually inside the square', where a letter and a number 'join', so that it is only the tigers which are 'A3' and that they should 'just write tigers'. Now the boys are finally set to go, after a brief discussion about how to spell 'coordinates', and what the date is. Kieran has understood Mrs. K., but Kevin has not, and we get a third kind of 'help' within the literacy activity, where Kieran models how to do each question, for Kevin, and Kevin checks out if he is doing things the right way:

Kieran Right, let's go. Got to go C three, so we know what that is. We end up at tigers, a., we end up at tigers, yea?

Kevin      Draw the square?

Kieran No, just write it. 'End up with the tigers in C3'

Although Kieran understands the question, and that you do not have to draw the square, he and Kevin use his oral phrase 'end up with' in each of their written answers, rather than choosing a more appropriate literate expression. They work their way through the worksheet, with Kieran modelling aloud what he is doing for each question, and Kevin always a few questions behind, listening to Kieran and also checking his own answers out with him. Kevin seems to be able to manage both these kinds of simultaneous help, listening to the modelling of answers to questions he is just about to get to, and also receiving feedback on the question he is currently on. Towards the end of the session he is starting to work independently and is getting much more confident. In the next extract, for instance, from the end of the morning, he correctly identifies what is in E2, and helps Kieran

locate the reptiles (though not using coordinates for this). Kevin's vocalisation of his own answer for E2 means Kieran can still monitor his work, and let him know if he makes a mistake.

Kieran Have you gone to the reptiles yet, A one?

Kevin No, not yet.

(30 secs)

Kieran (*funny voice*) 'wolves'

Kevin Toilets, you end up at the toilets on E two!

(60 secs)

Kieran Reptiles. Where's the reptiles?

Kevin Bottom corner

Kieran Oh yea, A one. That done!

In the later part of this session, Kieran and Kevin introduced a playful element into the task. This kind of joking, together with singing, was frequent in my recordings of children working collaboratively (see Appendix 2). It is one of the ways in which work time is transformed into play time, and activities designed with curricular objectives become vehicles for expressing and pursuing social goals.

Kieran Done that.(*reading*) 'Where do you find the, where do you find them, a, shop.'

Kevin (*vocalising his own answer*) D three

Kieran Find the shop

Kevin (*story voice*) 'The lions'. I'm writing 'You end up dead in the lions' cage'(*giggle*)

Kieran There ain't no lions

Kevin Oh, oh yea, I done that (*puts on voice again*) 'end up dead in the lions' cage!' (*giggle*)

Kieran You would be, there.

Kevin and Kieran both completed the exercise successfully, using the slightly unconventional wording 'End up with' to precede each answer (they each produced an individual but identical list).

Each of the three different kinds of help in tackling the literacy task which I have looked at here involved different kinds of relationships between helper and helped, and different sorts of positioning for the individuals involved. In the first example the boys resisted their positioning as 'silly wallys' which the help from Tina and Louise entailed, in the second example they are scaffolded (Bruner 1985) as apprentice learners by Mrs K. and, finally, the way Kieran models the answers for Kevin, and the two boys joke and play together, expresses and consolidates their friendship in the course of getting the work done. It is hard to imagine the exchange about the lions' den happening with the teacher, or with Tina and Louise.

Negotiation between friends about the meaning of instructions occurred frequently in the data. For example, the next rather different example comes from work in Camdean during the class scavenging hunt. Pupils were given a list of items to collect, and had to make explicit choices about which of a number of possible objects best represented a given item:

- Julie        (*reading*) 'Something soft'. Grass is soft, clovers are soft  
                  (*Kirsty holds out some thistle down*) that's beautiful!  
                  That's really soft!
- Sharon      Put one in
- Kirsty      Put a few in
- Julie        Yea, just in case one or two gets away

And after the hunt, checking that they had collected everything they needed involved some renegotiation. Their list included 'A leaf', 'Something beautiful', 'Something soft', and 'Something smooth':

- Julie        (*reads*) 'A leaf'. Take that leaf. It's beautiful. No, no, not  
                  that pink one.



Kirsty Yea.

Julie No, not the pink one. No, (*frantically*) not that one, that's for something else! I think- it might be for something else- yea, that WAS for something else, 'something smooth'

Kirsty We've got a petal

Julie Something smooth and something soft

Sharon Something soft

Julie And something smooth

Kirsty Yea, but they're both the same, aren't they?

Julie Oh yea, so they are (*gets up*) Right you look after Sleepy (*the snail the girls had collected in response to an item listed 'A small creature. (be very careful)'*). Don't shut the door on me- something smooth-

The kind of labelling and classificatory conventions being established here through the girls' discussion become part of the ground-rules which are relied on implicitly in so much classroom activity (cf Edwards and Mercer 1987). Julie and Kirsty establish between them that there should be one and only one object to represent each of the items listed. If a petal is 'Something soft', for instance, then it cannot in this context also count as 'Something smooth'. This particular convention is in fact counter- intuitive, since 'a leaf' can also be 'something beautiful', and a petal can be both soft and smooth. There is a struggle here between everyday experience where one object can have many different qualities, and the specific classroom literacy convention, as well as the struggle for social dominance between Julie and Kirsty.

This kind of collaborative talk, which can include duetting (discussed in Chapter Six): 'Something soft'/'and something smooth', but also disagreement, is serving to mediate the school text, as children struggle with school instructions and classificatory conventions. It is also playing out the social dynamics in the group, and affirming girls'

relationships with each other, and their gender identity. Although Julie and Kirsty often worked together, there was a certain amount of rivalry between them, and jostling for a leading role in group work. They were quick to challenge each other at every possible opportunity, and it could be argued that their disagreement here as to whether they should take the leaf or the petal has an educational benefit in pushing them to explicate the convention one item = one object, through each girl having to justify her own position. The naming of the snail 'Sleepy' and Julie's instructions to 'look after him' are another instance of the kind of nurturing behaviour which I suggested in Chapter Seven is a recurring theme in the girls' discourse (though not completely absent from the boys'). Similarly, the exclamations over the thistle-down: 'That's beautiful! That's really soft!' are much more commonly made by girls in the data, and I would suggest can function as a gender marker. 'That's lovely/soft/beautiful/pretty etc.' is a phrase structure used more commonly by women than men (Holmes 1994).

The jostling for power which often characterised Julie's and Kirsty's relationship could exert quite a powerful influence on the way they read, and responded to texts. The next extract shows an interaction between different ways of relating to and using a text, between Mrs. Reilly and Miss P., on the one hand, and Julie, Kirsty and Sharon, on the other. Again, the manner in which meaning is taken from the text is mediated through the social relationships among the people involved, and their talk together. Julie and Sharon are mounting their findings from the scavenging hunt on large sheets of card which will be displayed around the room for parents' evening. Kirsty and Mrs. Reilly have just brought a book on snails back from the school library.

- 1 Julie I'll just write 'This was drawn by bla bla bla'  
 Kirsty It's got thousands of teeth (*reads*) 'Its long tongue is covered with thousands of tiny teeth.' He's got thousands of teeth!
- 5 Julie He has, he's got thousands of teeth, that tiny snail has  
 Sharon Look at its trail!  
 (*Miss P. approaches the group*)  
 Julie Miss it's got hundreds and, it's got thousands and thousands of teeth
- 10 Kirsty /On its long tongue  
 Miss P. It's got what?  
 Kirsty Thousands of teeth. It says here.  
 Mrs. R. Those are tentacles. It's got four tentacles.  
 Julie Yea, teeth, teeth.
- 15 Mrs. R. (*reads*) 'to touch, feel and smell, and it breathes through the hole in its side.'  
 Julie teeth  
 Mrs. R. So there must be a hole somewhere  
 Julie 'eat' (*a suggestion to the pupil with the puzzle magazine*)
- 20 Mrs. R. We saw its eyes, didn't we? At the end of its tentacles, and it can only see light and dark  
 Julie (*to puzzle magazine pupil*) 'tune'  
 Pupil It can only be three letters  
 Julie /(*reads*) 'or more', three letters or more.
- 25 Kirsty Miss it's got a thousand, thousands of teeth on its tongue  
 Sharon Yes cause we went into the library. Mrs. Reilly and Kirsty went into the library to look it up.  
 Miss P. What's that, the snail?
- 30 Sharon Yea  
 Pupil Miss, where's the sellotape?  
 Sharon And it breathes through its side  
 Kirsty It breathes through its side  
 Sharon It's got this little hole
- 35 Kirsty /It breathes through a hole in its side  
 Mrs.R. Mrs. Smiley (*their language teacher*) would be interested in this



Miss P. Where are its eyes, then?

Kirsty These little things are for feeling

One of the striking aspects of this reading event around the book on snails is the way in which bits of the text are circulated within the group. Although it is Kirsty and Mrs. Reilly who actually read the text (lines 2-3 and 15-16), Julie and Sharon are also centrally involved in relating the information in the book to the snail in front of them. In lines 8-10 Julie and Kirsty collaboratively reiterate a piece of information from the text for the teacher. And in lines 32-35 Sharon and Kirsty again collaboratively reproduce information from the text. The ways in which these bits of text are being used, however, are significantly different. Mrs. Reilly appears to be encouraging the pupils to use the text to frame how they see the snail- to reconstruct their experience of it in the light of information about its teeth, tentacles, eyes and breathing mechanism in the book. The girls, however, seem more interested in extracting surprising and newsworthy pieces of information to announce to each other and Miss P. The interaction of these rather different ways of being a reader results in particular bits of the printed text being taken up and circulated within the oral language of different participants, 'reaccented' for their different purposes, for example the 'thousands of teeth' (Julie and Kirsty), the eyes (parent helper and teacher), breathing hole (parent, Sharon, Kirsty). In particular, Julie and Kirsty seize on particular pieces of information to vie with each other for the teacher's attention and approval. This is the social interaction which seems to dominate the reading, and Sharon's exclaiming about the snail's trail and Mrs. Reilly's identification of its tentacles are not taken up by the others at this point. Thus, although there may be a clash of individual purposes and reading practices, a particular

framing of the event around specific relationships may emerge as dominant, and contributions from individual speakers may or may not become part of this common frame, or shared pool of 'what we're talking about'. This kind of dominant frame seems more obvious and stable in teacher dominated teacher/pupil interaction, where teachers take up or reject pupil contributions into what they are defining as the authoritative discourse (for example Miss P's teaching the class how to set out pounds and pence on p167-8, also cf Edwards and Mercer 1987). In the example above, however, it is a pupil frame which seems to emerge temporally as dominant within the struggle between different discourses.

The example above shows a crossover of strategies used by children in relating to texts, between official and unofficial literacy events. In the embedded unofficial literacy event (lines 19 and 22-4, the exchange concerning how many letters were permissible in words to be made out of 'peanut' in a puzzle magazine), Julie and the pupil with the magazine use the same kind of collaborative negotiation of instructions as Kevin and Kieran did with their mathematics worksheet, and Julie, Kirsty and Sharon did with the scavenging hunt list. On the other hand, the way children announce parts of the text as newsworthy in the official event around the library book, was also characteristic of children's non-curriculum-related reading. For instance, in the next example, Julie and a friend are discreetly leafing through a magazine together while they are supposed to be drawing a picture and writing about it, as follow-up work to a reading from *The Silver Sword*. They engage with the text, and with each other, through exclaiming over particular bits of it:

Julie Which picture do you like best? Who do you like best?

Pupil Imagine having a princess at your birthday! Love it!

Julie That looks like Marilyn Monroe

Pupil (*in answer to Julie's first question*) That one

And, when the pupils are clearing out their work trays in preparation for parents' evening, Julie comes across an old air ticket. She exclaims over it, and reads extracts to the pupil next to her. In this case, Julie's assumption that these extracts are newsworthy is contested by the other girl:

Julie (*reads*) 'British Airways'. That is over a year old! Here's mine, look! (*reads*) 'Given name, Julie, Family name, Farlow, age, 9, sex, s, language

Pupil / That is donkey's years!

Julie Shut up, it's mine!

Pupil Yes I know, but I'm not just saying

Julie /That ain't donkey's years!

As Moss (1996) has shown, this announcing of bits of text contributes to children's presentation of the kind of person they are, which may be accepted or contested by others in the group. It is part of reaffirming and disputing friendship, as expressed through the implicit assumption that friends will react to and take meaning from these kinds of text in similar ways. Reading and commenting on the text in the first example is a kind of oral expression of what would otherwise be unmarked, implicit joint experience as the children look at the magazine together. In the second, the other pupil challenges the text's newsworthiness ('That is donkey's years!') and, by implication, Julie's presentation of herself as someone who goes jetting off on British Airways.



The examples throughout the chapter show participants orientating to both the referential and the pragmatic meanings of texts, and demonstrate how the second can mediate the first in various ways. The meaning Karen takes from Contours 1 is shaped by her induction into a particular way of relating to the genre it represents, the meaning of the scavenging list is negotiated in the context of relationships among a group of girls, and the meaning of the magazine is focused around the bits Julie and her friend choose to announce to each other. In some of the children's unofficial literacy events, pragmatic meaning seemed to almost overshadow referential meaning altogether. In the next extract below, Nicole, Melissa and Ella are sitting together working on a mathematics worksheet. The text which they are talking about, however, is a piece of graffiti in the cloakroom, from where Nicole has just returned.

- Nicole      There was something in the girls' toilet on the mirror, it said "Laura Clark for question mark" and I scrubbed it off with some water. It was just at the bottom of- say this is the mirror, right, the mirror, right the whole thing's the mirror and the edge of the mirror down here " Laura Clark" smeared "for"
- Melissa     /Well why did you say me and Karlie done it?
- Nicole      No, you, Karlie or Jackie done it. I just reckon it was.
- Melissa     Why? Well why did I get Laura?
- Nicole      I know you ain't, cause we're
- Ella         /It's Karlie
- Melissa     If anyone's done it, it's Karlie
- Nicole      I know, and Karlie's sitting on this table. Cause Karlie does write like that, doesn't she?

Although Nicole is the only one who read the original text, her repeating of it becomes a collaborative rereading, in relation to the identification of a putative author and, therefore, of a social meaning.

This meaning, then, is strongly shaped by the context of the rereading among a group of Laura's friends. The girls do not discuss the precise referential meaning: who the question mark might signify for example is never raised. The focus is rather on who wrote it and why, and the implications of this for relationships within the group. Nicole demonstrates her own friendship with Lisa by reporting that she immediately rubbed out the graffiti. In terms of deciding who has written the graffiti, there seems to be a kind of negotiation of agency going on, in relation to shifting relationships. Melissa challenges Nicole's accusation in terms of an implied relationship with Laura 'why did I get Laura?' ('getting' someone means doing something unpleasant to them, often in the context of 'getting back' at them in retaliation) and Nicole immediately accepts this 'I know', although she had previously 'just reckoned' it was either Melissa, Karlie or Jackie. Like many of the children's informal literacy practices, for example writing letters, notes in class, diaries, stories (see Appendix 2), the reading and writing here are closely tied up with maintaining or changing relationships, and with the construction of children's own identity in the context of relationships with others.

The location of this text is important to its meaning; if it had been written on the corner of Laura's rough work book cover for instance (these covers were a mass of such graffiti) by a close friend, then it could have been interpreted as a piece of friendly teasing. But 'smeared' on the mirror in the girls' toilet, making a potentially private relationship public in a site associated with smutty and sexual innuendo, I would suggest that it becomes a strong insult. The original pragmatic meaning of the text remains provisional; even the final comment 'Karlie does write like that' is ambiguous and could refer either to the style of the handwriting (which only Nicole has seen), or

to its content, or to a habit of leaving graffiti in public places. This particular group reading has its own pragmatics, however, in how individual girls are being positioned in relation to Laura, and each other. (cf Goodwin 1990 on the role of talk about an absent friend in girls' disputes). In the context of negotiating boundaries between friends, the nature of the accusations, who makes them about whom and who defends them is perhaps more significant than establishing the truth about the authorship (cf Shuman 1986).

## 8.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how children's interactions with and talk about texts in the classroom are embedded within ongoing social and institutional practices. I have described how the institutional power of education which allocates importance to particular knowledges, texts and discourses rather than others, is diffused throughout the management of time, space and activity within the classroom. In Lakeside, this institutional management is organised around the use of worksheets. The curriculum literacy activities I observed and recorded serve to reify literacy, through entailing particular ways of taking meaning from texts (for example the identification of fixed referential meanings in the discussions about Contours 1 and about how a rainbow is formed), and particular ways of displaying knowledge through text production (for example using labels, headings, and nominalisations). Talk around literacy activities often focusses on trying to work out the required procedures, and these are modelled or scaffolded by the teacher through dialogue in the teacher-pupil interactions. I have suggested that one way children appropriate classroom genres and discourses is through taking on the voice of the teacher. I have emphasised the collaborative nature of the



majority of literacy events in my data, and would suggest that in Vygotskian terms children's dialogue with teachers or each other in literacy events represents a kind of social reading, which may be internalised by individuals to direct their future interactions with texts.

The devolving of some of the institutional management of time, space, knowledge and activity onto the children themselves (for example through the choice of activity, the personal planning of work and the self-assessment record), can be seen in Foucault's terms as a further diffusion of institutional power, and a taking on by individual children of particular disciplining behaviours and genres. I have however pointed out that children find opportunities within this system to pursue personal goals, to transform activities in various ways, and to appropriate classroom strategies and genres for literacy activities outside the school curriculum. Children's involvement in literacy events is connected with the construction of knowledge in many kinds of ways, within the context of different and sometimes conflicting social strategies and power relations. Their literacy practices, both curricular and non-curricular, are a dynamic element in the constitution of relationships and identity.

There seems to be a contrast emerging between on the one hand authoritative discourse with its reification of literacy into worksheets, labels, headings, and a focus on fixed referential meanings, and, on the other, the greater emphasis on agency, process and provisionality in children's unofficial practices and their 'disqualified knowledges'. However, I would argue that this contrast is essentially dynamic, with a shifting interpenetration between the centripetal force expressed in the institutional pedagogisation of literacy (Street and Street 1991), and the centrifugal force of pupils' own inwardly persuasive

experience, expressed through what we might term their vernacularisation of school tasks, as they turn them into play or material for negotiating personal relationships, and appropriate them for other personal purposes. As Bakhtin puts it, 'Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their own uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward' (Bakhtin 1981 p272).

## Chapter Nine: Conclusion

My research into how children's informal language practices contribute to their construction of knowledge and identity has been motivated by concerns at both theoretical and empirical levels. At the theoretical level, I wanted to develop a model which could capture fine-tuned, dynamic interrelationships between communication and context, in the analysis of the function and meaning of children's informal language practices. In empirical terms, I was keen to investigate the under researched area of specific communicative events and practices among a group of 10-12 year olds. Throughout my research, there has been a dialogue between these two levels. My focus on informal talk is itself theoretically motivated. The various social theories of language underpinning the ethnography of communication work, discourse studies and the Russian sociohistorical literature, all point to everyday talk as a key site for the negotiation of knowledge and identity at a micro-level, and also for the negotiation and instantiation of the broader social structure, and more general cultural values. Similarly, from a psychological point of view, Vygotskian theory suggests that children's dialogues provide a rich site for looking at the ways in which they are constructing meanings and knowledge, and that these dialogues will also reveal insights into the kinds of meanings and knowledge which are being privileged in a particular cultural and historical context. Thus a practical investigation of children's informal language practices has theoretical implications in terms of how it reflects on these ideas in the literature, in addition to empirical interest in terms of its specific findings. As I have described in the thesis, in the course of my research I extended and



refined a number of theoretical concepts from the literature, for example notions of context, the evaluative function of narrative, and the intertextual 'work' of reported speech. I then used these new extended notions to focus in from the rather broad questions about children's undirected talk with which I started out, onto more specific questions about particular language features and strategies. My findings, therefore, contribute to the field at both the empirical and the theoretical level. They provide additional data in the under researched area of children's informal talk, and they also have implications for further conceptual and theoretical development in relation to social aspects of communication. In methodological terms, they demonstrate how a combination of ethnographic and textual analysis can be used within a sociocultural analysis of the function and meaning of talk.

I explained at the beginning of the thesis that investigating how children's language practices contribute to their construction of knowledge and identity raises important questions about the relationship between text and context, the social and historical dimensions of language interactions, and the links between micro-level language activities, and more macro-level structures. In order to address these questions, I developed a theoretical framework drawing mainly on work in the ethnography of communication and related areas, particularly using recent work which employs more dynamic notions of context, knowledge and identity. This has enabled me to look in some detail at how various aspects of the immediate and broader context are acknowledged, invoked and constructed by children in their language practices, and at the various collaborative strategies involved in negotiating and renegotiating knowledge and identity across different language events and different sites. In order

to further develop a more dialogic model of communication, and to extend my analysis of intercontextual links in relation to children's experience, I supplemented this framework with ideas from the Bakhtin/Volosinov writings about heteroglossia, dialogicality and reported speech, and from Vygotskian theory about the way language mediates between individual cognitive development and sociocultural experience. I have argued that Vygotsky's ideas about the relationship between intramental and intermental functioning can provide a psychological basis for Bakhtin and Volosinov's semiotic theory of language.

While the ethnography of communication approach tends to focus at the level of a detailed documentation of particular language and literacy events within specific social groups, the Bakhtin/Volosinov writings suggest ways of linking the micro and the macro. This is done through Bakhtin's notion of the dynamics of heteroglossia, and the struggle between authoritative and inwardly persuasive discourses, and through Volosinov's emphasis on the pivotal role of everyday speech as a dynamic manifestation of the link between individual mental creativity, and the material basis of the sociopolitical order. The link between micro and macro-levels is also developed, from a complementary perspective, within Foucault's notion of discourses as ordering particular complexes of conceptions, classifications and language use.

In methodological terms, the ethnography of communication approach enabled me to investigate patterns in children's language use in terms of their own purposes, in their continuous experience over a substantial part of the day, rather than view this language either from the point of view of educational criteria, or specific linguistic features, as other researchers have done. I also use the ethnography of

communication approach together with ideas from the sociohistorical literature to analyse some of the precise ways in which the children in my study were using language in relating to each other and to adults, and orientating to texts, knowledge and identity across different language and literacy events. Given my theoretical perspective, my key empirical units include utterance, voice, dialogical relations, language and literacy events. Because the language of description I am endeavouring to develop is focused on patterns of behaviour and meaning across events, I use the terms language and literacy practices to refer to such patterns, which are empirically evidenced within the data. At the level of particular events, my micro-level analysis focusses on specific interactions, and shows that individual speaker turns whether a brief utterance or a longer account, are dialogically shaped in relation both to past utterances and anticipated future responses, and that utterances often invoke a complex network of other intertextual links. I show that these links connect utterances with a series of contextual layers, in terms of social and institutional setting, and in the related encoding of these within discourse. The outer layers, as it were, incorporate Foucault's notion of a historically situated symbolic order, so that while I am focusing on a much more specific level of everyday language experience, my analysis links the patterns I am documenting with their broader discursive context.

My results come from a small, qualitative study which focusses on two school classes of children in specific settings. Caution needs to be used, then, in drawing any generalisations. My study did, however, generate eighty hours of audiotape and related observation notes and texts.

This data demonstrates the subtlety and complexity with which 10-12 year olds can use language to negotiate knowledge and identity, and the range of generic settings within which they talk, read and write in



very different ways. I would suggest that the patterns of language use I have identified, in relation to collaboration, children's use of reported speech, narrative and literacy events, are so pervasive in the data as to provide clear indications concerning the practices of children of this age and to suggest significant areas for further research and theoretical development.

I shall now briefly summarise my specific findings. I have shown that children's language is both sensitive to setting and constitutive of it, and how their talk acknowledges the nature of the social setting, cultural values, and the relationships and shared history among participants. Practices reflect the generic potential of specific settings, and encode particular relationships, subject positions and silences. Children also invoke their physical surroundings, and other contexts, through the use of deixis and reported speech, and create their own discursive contexts within talk through rekeying frames, and occasionally holding a number of frames simultaneously to create ambiguity and retain options for different speaker positions and purposes. Intertextual links between contexts are manipulated to create different layers of meaning, and are sometimes themselves the focus of meaning in an utterance.

The complex dialogical relations between different contextual frames are illustrated particularly clearly in the case of reported speech, which children use to invoke and evaluate people, relationships, and scenarios. Reported speech reconstructs and 'accents' personal experience, including its affective aspects, and can also be used to evoke more general categories of social experience. Children frame the voices they report, grammatically and prosodically, to express varying degrees of alignment and distance. This double-framed aspect of discourse containing reported speech problematises notions of speaker

and audience, as narrators exploit the potential of dialogic relations among different frames, as well as moving between frames within an account. Children also use quasi-direct speech (Bakhtin 1981) or free indirect discourse (Toolin 1988), where the authorial voice is 'coloured' by the perspective of someone the child is talking about. Sometimes children appropriate another voice more or less completely, and produce it as if it were their own. In Vygotskian terms, taking on the voice of a significant adult in this way can be seen as an important aspect of educational and moral development. For Bakhtin, 'The ideological becoming of a human being ... is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others' (1981 p341).

Children use a range of collaborative strategies in building on and extending each other's comments, sharing and competing for the floor, and giving accounts to the teacher and other adults. I have shown how they orientate towards each other through their management of turntaking, grammatical structures, and in the development of larger conceptual units across conversations. The construction of these larger units of meaning is recursive and iterative, with dialogical connections crossing and criss-crossing the boundaries of speaker turns and conversational structures. I have demonstrated that while girls' group talk illustrates some of the female gendered features identified in sociolinguistic research, girls also use a range of other interactive styles. And although boys' group talk exhibits a competitive jostling for the floor which has been seen as a typically male style, I have shown that this kind of talk can also contain collaborative features, and have overall collaborative effects. I have also discussed many examples of boys using more overtly supportive collaborative strategies, with friends in class and in the interviews. My data supports Och's view that 'the relation of language to gender is

constituted and mediated by the relation of language to stances, social acts, social activities and other social constructs' (1992 p337).

I have shown that conversational narrative offers a particularly rich site for looking at how children are constructing identity. As in other aspects of children's language use, the links narratives make with their conversational and wider contexts, the children's use of dialogue within stories, and the various levels of collaboration between narrators and listeners, are all centrally implicated in language structure, function and meaning. I focus on the evaluative function of children's stories, but I extend Labov's analysis, drawing on ethnographic research and Bakhtin and Volosinov's work, in order to capture the more complex and dynamic processes in children's use of conversational narrative. In particular, I give more attention to contextual issues and to children's use of reported speech, which I suggest drives both the referential and evaluative functions of their conversational narratives. I show how children's stories are orientated towards listeners and previous conversational turns, and that they also set up intertextual connections with other stories and other conversations, to create additional connotations and layers of meaning. Children's stories revisit particular themes and preoccupations, for example toughness and gentleness, their emerging new gendered identities and relationships, and their changing relations with parents and other authority figures, and in this sense a narrative may be seen as a turn in a more meta-level long conversation, carried on among children across different interactions and settings.

Within the stories, children use reported speech to explore and evaluate a variety of perspectives. Similarly, the voices children create for themselves in different stories allow them to try out and negotiate various aspects of their own identity. In both cases,



evaluations may seem ambiguous and unsettled, and the speaking subject can be seen in the process of being constructed, both through the dialogic relations between narrator and audience, and through the dialogic relationships among the various invoked voices. This more process-focused view of the speaking subject is consistent with Vygotsky's conception of the dialectical relationship between words and thoughts.

Through my analysis of literacy events in the data, and of the children's accounts of their literacy practices which they gave me in the interviews, I show how children's interactions with and talk about written texts are embedded in ongoing social and institutional practices. I suggest that there is a tension between authoritative institutionalised practices, on the one hand, and children's own vernacular practices on the other, with interesting dynamic links between these two areas of experience. In the first case, the institutional organisation of literacy activities within the curriculum manages time, space and activity to authenticate some discourses, knowledges and texts rather than others. On the other hand, children find opportunities within this system to pursue personal goals, transform activities in various ways, and appropriate classroom strategies and genres for literacy activities outside the school curriculum. The labels and instructions of schooled literacy are also used in texts serving pupils' private purposes, as are the genres of story, poetry and song. In the classroom a curriculum task can also serve as a vehicle for pursuing social goals, and for expressing and consolidating relationships.

Overall, my study demonstrates the importance and complexity of aspects of children's talk which have been under researched by social scientists, and dismissed by many teachers and educationalists as

being of little consequence. In the area of language and education, current trends in British educational policy towards centralisation are evident in the increasing emphasis which is being placed on standard English, and on a canonical English literary heritage. In relation to 'Speaking and Listening', the most recent *Orders for English* (Department for Education 1995) place at the head of their list of 'General Requirements' a stipulation that children should be taught 'the vocabulary and grammar of standard English' (p2). The programmes of study for oral English acknowledge the importance of audience and context in relation to children's use of language, but also place a strong emphasis on clarity, precision and other aspects of presentation, with a sharp differentiation between speaking and listening which recalls the traditional transmission model of communication.

While the aspects of language use these *Orders* highlight may be given priority within current policy and curriculum aims, and are obviously important in relation to particular educational goals, there is a danger in taking them as representing the full range of ways in which children should be expected to communicate within the classroom, or indeed of adopting the rather simplistic model of communication which they seem to imply. I have shown that effective communication is not just a matter of clear transmission and attentive reception, but involves a complex range of collaborative and intertextual signalling, and a creative use of indeterminacy and ambiguity. Utterances create complicated webs of dialogical interdependencies, and meaning is constructed not just within the bounds of one communicative event, but iteratively and recursively across different conversations and sites. There is also a danger in focusing on the 'correctness' of forms and styles at the level of text, of ignoring the social functions of

children's language use, which I have shown are an important aspect of meaning even in the most specific curriculum task. Within children's talk, intellectual and social purposes are very closely intertwined, and the construction of knowledge and the negotiation of identity proceed together throughout both curricular and non-curricular language and literacy activities.

It is not appropriate to make specific educational recommendations on the basis of research which tried consciously to avoid a framework of educational and pedagogical criteria. However, I would suggest that the organisation, management and scope of oral activities in the classroom should take account of the complexity and range of children's communicative strategies, some of which I have illustrated in this thesis. It should also acknowledge the importance of children's 'inwardly persuasive discourse', which is much more open and provisional in both structure and meaning than 'authoritative discourse', and which has a vital creative role in the struggle between centrifugal and centripetal forces which keeps language and communication alive (Bakhtin 1981). I hope that my study may also contribute to more general knowledge and understanding about the structure, function and meaning of children's undirected talk, and its importance in negotiating knowledge and identity as they move from childhood into adolescence. In particular, it should demonstrate to educationalists and social scientists both the subtlety and the adventurousness of children's explorations through talk, as they explore knowledge about cultural institutions, social relations and personal agency.

In the account of my methodology, I stressed the centrality of dialogue in both the content and the method of my research. I have investigated dialogues among children, and endeavoured in theoretical



terms to develop a more dialogic model of communication, in order to explain the complex collaborative features and intertextual links, within children's talk. I gathered much of my contextualising data through talking directly with children myself, and I developed my analysis and interpretation of the data through discussions with other colleagues in the field, as well as in the constant back and forth inner dialogue, between the data, theoretical sources, and my ongoing analysis. Finally, as a further but not an ultimate stage in the dialogical process of doing research, I see this thesis as my own conversational turn in a much longer conversation within the social sciences about the nature of communication, and the relationships between language, knowledge and identity.

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## Appendix 1      List of published papers drawing on PhD research

- Maybin, J. (1991) 'Children's informal talk and the construction of meaning', in *English in Education*, Vol.25, No.2.
- Maybin, J. and Moss, G. (1993) 'Children talk text' in *Changing English* Vol 1, no. 1.
- Maybin, J. and Moss, G. (1993) 'Talk about texts: reading as a social event' in *Journal of research in reading* Vol. 16, no. 2. (Special edition B. Street (ed.) 'The new literacy studies' .)
- Maybin, J. (1993) 'Dialogic relationships and the construction of knowledge in informal talk', in D. Graddol, L. Thompson and M. Byram (eds) *Language and culture: British studies in applied linguistics* 7. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Maybin, J. (1994) 'Children's voices: talk, knowledge and identity' in D. Graddol, J. Maybin and B. Stierer (eds) *Researching language and literacy in context*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters. Also to be published in J. Cheshire and P. Trudgill (eds) (forthcoming) *The sociolinguistics reader*, London, Edward Arnold.
- Maybin, J. (forthcoming) 'Story voices: the use of reported speech in 10-12 year olds' spontaneous narratives' in *Current issues in language and society* Vol 3 (1) (Special edition ed. L. Thompson 'Child language: the development of sociolinguistic competence').

## Appendix 2 Writing outside the school curriculum

### Introduction

In the interviews with children, I asked them what kinds of writing they did outside their school work. Following Basso (1991), I shall discuss the information children gave me in terms of their use of writing as a social, communicative activity. I shall suggest that they use writing to maintain and pursue social relationships, to transform experience (cf Bruner, E. 1986) and in the development of different aspects of their own identity.

All of the thirty two children whom I interviewed used writing for their own purposes outside of school tasks. Children said they:

- \* wrote personal letters regularly (13 children)
- \* made up stories and rhymes (9)
- \* wrote notes and graffiti in school (9)
- \* kept diaries (5)
- \* wrote off for offers in magazines, to join clubs and enter competitions (5)
- \* copied out the words of popular songs (5)
- \* wrote out rules, and names and addresses for their own clubs (4)
- \* used lists and charts (3)
- \* drew cartoon stories and other pictures. (3)

### Letters (personal and non-personal)

Letter writing was important to children in (a) maintaining family and other relationships, (b) pursuing new friendships, (c) making particular kinds of social moves and (d) becoming a consumer.

(a) The children's lives had involved a lot of moving homes, and often these moves were associated with the break up and reconstitution of family units; 50% of the children were not living with both their original parents (though all lived with at least one), some were

separated from brothers and sisters, and some had formed attachments in the past to people closely associated with the family who had now moved away. Jackie, for instance, told me 'Well I normally write them (*letters*) to my mum because she doesn't live with us, you see, and my nan. I write to my uncle in Austria and all my cousins.' And Karlie, whose dad is in prison explains 'I write to my dad when he's so far away from me, so I let him know what's going on down here and he writes letters back and then I get cards from him at Christmas ...I write to my dad every week because he likes to get in touch with me.' Lee writes 'letters to my dad in London and he writes back sometimes - and usually every week but mostly now every month and I'm going- I've started a letter today and I'm finishing it off tonight.'

In addition to close family members, Kim writes to a friend of her mum's, who has moved to Cyprus, and Melissa writes to her sister's ex- boyfriend who is in prison.

(b) A number of children talked about making friends with a child who was visiting the area, or while they themselves were visiting elsewhere. This friendship would be pursued by letter (often not for very long). In these cases, I often got the impression that the idea of having a pen friend was as important as the actual friendship itself. Tina explained 'I did have a penpal till I lost her address. She lives at Felixstowe. Em my-my Auntie lives up Felixstowe, so I met her up there an' I used to go round her house an' that ...I only writ one letter.' Sherri and Karlie had both been writing to boyfriends. Karlie explained how she met her friend: ' ..his nan lives in my court, when he comes down to see his nan and I met him that way, through his-through his nan, because his nan used to look after me when my mum used to work, so I met him through that way .....I get a letter from him nearly every month now.' Sherri met her boyfriend when she went to stay with her aunt, but 'I chucked him when I last wrote to him which was a couple of weeks ago ....there's no point me going out with him when he's right over there and I'm right over here'.

As well as corresponding with friends of their own age, some girls wrote to older teenage girls who had spent time with their class as part of their school work experience course. One of these older teenage girls was corresponding with about six girls in the class, who had each received up to five letters from her. When it was time for me to finish my recording in the classroom, a number of the children asked me to write to them, at their home addresses.

While Camitta (1993) sees the solitary, reflective diary writing activities of older adolescents as an important use of writing for constructing identity, I would suggest that letter writing, closely tied up with ongoing relationships, was a more frequent activity for the 10-12 year olds I studied, and an important aspect of their personal development at this stage in their lives.

(c) The third kind of context for personal letter writing was where it was chosen to convey a message which would have been embarrassing to deliver in direct speech, for example the expression of intense emotion (cf Besnier 1989). Karlie explained how her boyfriend had



first asked her out through a letter. '..he just asked me one day, he just came up to me and asked me, written a letter ....it just says, "will you go out with me, I like you so much", and things like this in the letter. It was just embarrassing....'. Another situation when girls had written letters to close friends was when they wanted to make up after an argument, and say 'sorry'.

(d) Children also wrote non-personal letters, to send off for offers in magazines and comics, to join clubs and to enter competitions. Tina explained: 'I write to New Kids on the Block which has got a fan club and that- so I write letters to them.' Melissa: 'I was writing some letters the other day -I get this weekly magazine - not the other day, about two weeks ago, and it was on this crime thing so I sent off for that and writ them a letter and I got the book through and it was quite good'.

### Stories, rhymes and songs

Seven children said they made up their own stories. Sherri and Laura said they did this when they were bored : 'I write stories-loads. Em my sister's always writing me stories -she keeps writing about the three bears all different versions. Sometimes I copy out of books.

Sometimes I just make up my own.'(Laura). Sometimes stories are started and abandoned after a page or so; but Keith said his were often four pages long. What are these stories about? Ella, who says she's going to put her stories into a book, writes about a family. Michelle's stories are about 'this girl Sally and her boyfriend'. Kevin explained 'I draw pictures, I make up cartoon characters and kind of do pictures and do some writing- when I've nothing to do- I make up funny stories about this boy who wears a navy T-shirt and Bermuda shorts- about all his friends and that- in boxes with speech bubbles'. Children's stories seemed to be about themselves, transformed through writing into imaginary characters whom they could use to explore experience and relationships (cf Steedman 1982).

The writing of rhymes and songs, however, seems more to do with an exploration of genre, and in the case of songs, with social, convivial singing with others. A number of girls copied out the words of popular songs, so that they could learn them. My tapes include numerous snatches of popular songs, which girls (and to a lesser extent boys) sing together, both while working in class and in other parts of the school. These bits of song can contribute important aspects of meaning to the conversations in which they are inserted (for example in the conversation in the girls' toilets discussed in Chapter Four), but often the joint singing seems to function among the girls as an expression of friendship, and in-group membership. It created a harmonious atmosphere and active enjoyment between friends, in the same way as Kevin and Kieran's playing and joking with the text of the maths problem did (see Chapter Eight).

Both Jackie and Helen said they made up short rhymes, like the ones in books of humorous verse. 'Sometimes I make up funny ones, not proper poetry like all that like, like, something

like this, " There was a young man from Teroo, He- he dreamt he was eating his shoe, He woke one night with a terrible fright, And found he was covered in (...)"'. (Jackie)

### Subrosa writing in school

A number of children talked about (a) graffiti (b) passing notes (c) writing and number games.

(a) 'If you look at our books it's got hundreds of writing on it. We do a lot of that while we're working' (Martie)

'Are you allowed to graffiti all the books? We ain't' (Gary to boy from another class)

The only graffiti I noticed (mainly on children's exercise books), was of the 'DM for EW' type, or the names of popular singers or football teams. The first kind was the one that children talked about, for instance Darren said he sometimes wrote his own initials, with 'for' and his girlfriend's initials, on exercise books. But graffiti on public spaces, like the mirror in the girls' toilets (see chapter Eight), was usually anonymous, and was taken to be written from malicious intent, possibly representing a betrayal of confidence.

Unlike Hodges (1988), who argues that the secondary school graffiti he collected represented a symbolic and oppositional claiming of territory by the relatively powerless, I would suggest that the graffiti writing of the 10-12 year olds I studied was more significant in its power to express and transform relationships (both between the two sets of initials, and between them and the author of the graffiti), than as an oppositional statement to the school and other powerful institutions.

(b) Because most activities involved informal group work, the children had plenty of opportunity for the kind of communication which in a more formal classroom would have had to be carried out clandestinely, and therefore they did not have as much need to use notes as pupils in a more formally managed classroom. They did pass notes however during the twenty minutes of silent reading which always took place on their return to class after lunch. 'During silent reading me and Darren have chats in letters cause we can't talk' (Martie). Notes were also used to tease - for example Karen passed round a note reading 'Ella for Terry Smith' when Ella's boyfriend was in fact Terry Elton, who was also in the class. Various children stuck notes saying 'Kick me' 'fleas' and 'rubbish bin' on other children's backs.

(c) Martie explained: 'we do something, God knows what they call it but where you write two names, you write 'loves' in the middle, and you cross off the 'l's, see how many 'l's and you put the number, and you do it all the way through em 'love' and you do all the numbers and when you've got the numbers you've got to add the numbers and keep on

adding them until you get a two figure and that's the percentage you love them, out of 100 per cent. God knows who invented it!

## Diaries

Some children simply wrote appointments and reminders in their diary, for instance Nicole told me 'I've bought a diary and I just keep PE stuff, swimming and stuff like that and important stuff like when I've got to go to the doctor's or something, when I go to me Auntie Barbara's, when I go to Wales to see my granddad'.

The recording of significant events, like visiting relatives is of course also a way of marking points of significant experience, which have some kind of important meaning. This was also the case where children wrote more extensive entries. Tina told me: 'I've got a little diary but I only write in there when I've got something- when something happens. I don't bother otherwise. ... then I look back and have a laugh at what I've written. Mind you I sometimes I write in code just in case someone finds it and sometimes I go (*puzzled voice*) 'What's that? Oh oh no I can't remember now what I writ it' cause cause I've got loads of little codes..... What do I write about? What happens in horse riding is something it's got in cause we went out on a hack -a hack round the lake and em on the way back we got nearer to the lake and all of a sudden three horses bolted away with these girls on them and my horse kept rearing up on its two legs to go to go but I pulled it back and I held it (*giggles*) it was funny though (*giggles*)'. Horse riding is one of Tina's main interests outside school; she often draws pictures of horses, and the diary entry represents an attempt to capture the intensity of 'something happening', of an experience which is an important part of the person she is.

Diaries were seen as strictly personal and private: Louise said she wrote in her sister's diary 'because she writes about her boyfriend in there and I start writing about my boyfriend and she doesn't like it'. Karlie said ' Yes my mum keeps a diary a lot because she just writes what she don't say cause my mum's going to the doctor today cause she's getting pains up her head (*pointing*)-there- so she's got to go to the doctor to see if she's OK or not to work'.

## Rules for clubs

Sam and Simon had begun to make out membership cards for the club they planned to start in the shed in Sam's back garden. They were writing out a list of club rules- 'What they're not allowed to do', and the names and addresses of friends who wanted to join.

Laura and Melissa showed me the list of rules they had written out one evening at Laura's home when they decided to start a secret club (see Appendix 3). The actual club had not materialised any further in either case, though both pairs of children had discussed who might be asked to join.



## Lists and charts

Some children used lists to help them to organize themselves and each other. Martie: 'I used to have a thing on the back of my door (*at home*) saying when I've got PE, Games and things like that'. Gary draws up lists of players for sides in football at dinner time, and, in discussion with friends, allocates them to the various team places. Terry uses a rather more sophisticated chart for the work that he does at home with an adult friend, on renovating and repairing cars. Terry: 'I've got a list at home ...I've got this list of cars and I've got little boxes where you have to tick it if you've done that sort of car. And I've got a list of names of engine- bits on the engine and I tick off whatever car I've done, whatever part I've fixed on that car. (*did you get the chart out of a book?*) No I done that myself cause it saves you just writing it down.... When you do it you can sort of think about what you've done. (*What gave you the idea?*) Well, when we do it, how much that bit is, cause we can forget how much that bit was, and if- I add the price list on as well- I have the manual that shows up all the prices for everything and that bit shows how much every part is and I've made the list in case I lose the book. So I've made the list so I can't lose the book. ....It's pinned up on the wall. (*Drawing it to show me*) It's just like a normal grid. You put a list of the cars and the parts down this side....Say like if I'd done Cortina, I'd have to tick it off there so I know what I've done - it's just like a register.'

Terry's chart is acting as a memory aid, and as a way of drawing on and consolidating learning from previous experience. Filling in the chart enables you to 'sort of think about what you've done'. His explanation that it's 'just like a normal grid....like a register' suggests appropriation of a school genre, and an acknowledgement of my own greater familiarity with the classroom than the garage.

## Conclusion

Writing was an important activity for the children I studied. It was, as Basso puts it, a 'dynamic component in the conduct and organisation of social relations' (Basso 1991, p431), in a number of different ways. Letters were used to maintain and explore relationships, and also to transform them. Graffiti also could transform relationships in particular ways, and writing club rules created boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable social behaviour, and between the included members, and the excluded non-members.

The content and positions taken up in letters were an important statement about the self, and this was also explored among a smaller number of children in diary entries and story writing. Copying out and learning the words of popular songs enabled children to express particular allegiances and identities, and to add to and comment on meanings within conversations.

Writing also opened the way to joining clubs in magazines and comics. Children used lists and charts to extend and organize their powers of memory and reflection. Many of the children I interviewed spoke of writing when they were bored, or had nothing else to do (cf Camitta 1993), but they were more likely to transform this emptiness by writing a letter, than a diary entry. Boredom for them was often synonymous with lack of social contact, and I would suggest that the construction of personhood at this age, as well as the construction of knowledge, is something that happens primarily for most of the children I studied through social interaction rather than through solitary activities. Although children played about with different genres, and exploited the use of writing to extend mental activity, the greatest significance of writing for them was the work it could do within social relationships, and how it could be used to make statements about those relationships, and directly or indirectly about the child's own identity.

**Appendix 3: Melissa and Laura's club  
rules**



## Our rules of our club

1. No Smoking.
2. No using and you must always use your manners.
3. No swearing.
4. No going off.
5. No staying in during Playtime.
6. No Eating your food at lunch time.
7. always sit with a partner.
8. No calling any other member of the club names.
9. No kicking, punching, Pulling hair.
10. No not lie or cheat.
11. No swapping with some one outside of the club.



**Appendix 4: Mirrors**

# MIRRORS

SCIENCE

with  
half the  
group.

## INVESTIGATION

1

Can you use mirrors to see round a corner?

What is the least number of mirrors needed?

REMEMBER HOW LIGHT TRAVELS AND HOW IT IS REFLECTED.

## INVESTIGATION

2

Can you design and make an instrument to see under/over/around?

Draw out your design on scrap paper first. Show the measurements. Show how you will fix it together. Make a list of what you will need.



## **Appendix 7: Children's timetable**

# ( MIDDLE SCHOOL - TIMETABLE 1990/1991

CLASS 8T TEACHER( ) ROOM 8

	9:00	9:30	9:45	10:15	10:45	11:00	11:30	12:00	1:00	1:30	2:00	2:30
MONDAY	Whole School Assembly					B			L	SILENT		
TUESDAY	U/S Assembly		P.E. → ← Hall			R			U	N T R		
WEDNESDAY	L/S Assembly					E			N	E A A		← GAMES →
THURSDAY	Sharing Assembly					A			C	N G	swimming	
FRIDAY	Singing Practice					X			H		← HALL →	

**Appendix 8: Children's activity record sheet**



AT	Activity	1st draft	2nd draft	complete	My comment	Teacher's Comment	Initial
	(M) Symmetry J2.3						
	Co-ordinates Stage 4 TB 17-19						
	Probability — Wikisheets Make card pack Play game with partner						
	(S) Light 1 2 3 4						
	(R) Contours 1 2						
	Interview ½ term write up.						
	(A) Mirrors 1 Make instrument to see around corners (under) over.						
	Silent Reading	M T W T F	M T W T F				
	Handwriting	M T W T F	M T W T F				
	FRENCH						
	STARPOL						

**Appendix 9: Children's card**  
(showing how the radio  
microphone and transmitter  
were worn)

# FAREWELL

and good luck

